This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

450 copies of this book have been printed on Van Gelder hand-made paper and the type distributed.

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

BY ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

PORTLAND MAINE
THOMAS B MOSHER
MDCCCXCIX

This One

27BU-X4T-6345

PREFACE

PREFACE

WHEN the history of the calamities and quarrels of modern authors comes to be written out in detail it is very certain that the period in English letters between 1860–1875 will demand and receive respectful attention. Foremost among the *documents humains*, which the bitter animosities aroused by Robert Buchanan's blatant and brutal attack[1] upon Rossetti, Swinburne and Morris, brought to the surface, must ever remain, "through glad and sorry years," the rare pamphlet we now reprint.[2]

Irradiating and informing *Under the Microscope* is a rapture of rage unmistakably Swinburnian. Junius, Swift even, might have borrowed from such an

---

[1] *The Fleshly School of Poetry and Other Phenomena of the Day. By Robert Buchanan. Strahan & Co.*, 56, Ludgate Hill, London, 1872. Octavo, pink wrapper, pp. x: 97.

[2] Under | the Microscope. | By | Algernon Charles Swinburne. | London: | D. White, 22, Coventry Street, W, | 1872.

Collation:—Crown octavo, pp. iv.+88; consisting of Half-title (with blank reverse), pp. i.–ii.; Title-page, as above (with imprint: "*London: | Savill, Edwards and Co., Printers, Chandos Street, | Covent Garden*," upon the centre of the reverse), pp. iii.–iv.; and Text pp. 1–88.

Issued in stone-coloured paper wrappers, with the Title-page (enclosed in an ornamental ruled frame) reproduced upon the front—"*Price Two Shillings and Sixpence*" being added

exhaustless vocabulary of vituperation. Compared with this terrific invective, the earlier printed protest of Rossetti is almost in the nature of a compliment![3]

We have sometimes thought that the origin of Buchanan's attack might be assigned to a caustic handling of his young friend and protégé, David Gray,

---

at foot. Inserted at the end is a slip with the following Errata:—

Page 32, last line but one—*for* monsieurs, *read* messieurs.
" 61, line 19—*for* Πολλὸς, *read* Πολὺς.
" 72, line 18—*for* Hugos, *read* Hugo's.
" " line 19—*for* Brownings, *read* Browning's.

Upon examining any copy of *Under the Microscope* it will be observed that Sig. D 5 (pp. 41–42) is a cancel-leaf. The original leaf was wisely suppressed, as certain of the expressions used in relation to the characters of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* were unduly harsh. The following passage, describing "the courteous and loyal Gawain of the old romancers" as "the very vilest figure in all that cycle of strumpets and scoundrels, broken by, here and there, an imbecile, which Mr. Tennyson has set revolving round the figure of his central wittol," is unjust as well as severe. It is believed that only two copies of this cancelled leaf were preserved.

The manner in which the copies of *Under the Microscope* have been absorbed is remarkable. Five hundred copies were printed in 1872, and until quite recent years examples of these were readily obtainable at 5s. or 7s. 6d. each. Now copies occur at increasingly lengthened intervals, and find a prompt and ready sale at fifty shillings, and even three guineas each. — *(Literary Anecdotes of the Nineteenth Century: Edited by W. Robertson Nicoll, and Thomas J. Wise.* London, 1896. Vol. II., p. 326.*)*

3 *The Stealthy School of Criticism* in the *Athenæum* for December 16, 1871. Reprinted in Rossetti's *Collected Works*, 2 vols., 8vo. (London, 1886.)

whose slight claims as poet were set forth and disallowed by Mr. Swinburne in 1867.[4] Either this or an unwise desire to pose as literary censor, mixed with and marred by immedicable envy of the men he singled out for reprobation, seems to us the secret source of irritation lying back of the entire controversy.[5]

Under the Microscope was written in the plenitude of Swinburne's poetic powers: unequalled for bitterness, save by some of Swift's murderous pamphlets, it is never uncritical nor, provocation considered, unjust. Its justification should be sought — if sought at all — in the effect Buchanan's mendacious essay produced upon Rossetti. It is certain that this arraignment of his motives embittered the great poet's life and was the direct cause of the suppression of one imperishable sonnet and the re-writing of several others in *The House of Life*. No greater

---

4 See *Matthew Arnold's New Poems* by A. C. Swinburne in the *Fortnightly Review* for October, 1867, since re-issued in his *Essays and Studies* (1875).

5 The animus against his brother, according to Mr. W. M. Rossetti, "should be regarded as a vicarious expression of resentment" at the following remark which opened his review entitled *Swinburne's Poems and Ballads, a Criticism* (1866): "The advent of a new great poet is sure to cause a commotion of one kind or another; and it would be hard were this otherwise in times like ours, when the advent of even so poor and pretentious a poetaster as a Robert Buchanan stirs storms in teapots." (*Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters with a Memoir by W. M. Rossetti.* London, 1895. Vol. I, p. 294.)

Buchanan from the beginning appears to have indulged a penchant for ridiculing his fellow poets. See Appendix I.

artistic mistake was ever made than that of deferring to this preposterous criticism, as it is conceded that the original text of the *Poems* (1870) was of unblemished beauty.

In after years an attempt at reparation and conciliation with Rossetti was made by Buchanan,[6] but it is not on record that an apology was ever tendered the author of *Under the Microscope.*[7] Nevertheless, the whirligig of time may be said to have brought in its revenges unaided by Mr. Swinburne. Buchanan, after successively, if not successfully, posing as poet, novelist, playwright and critic at large, has, in these later days, turned publisher on his own account. As for Mr. Alfred Austin, — that gifted author of *The Poetry of the Period* is now poet-laureate in place of Tennyson, the illustrious predecessor whose poetry to the astute critic of that day seemed so deserving of moral disapproval. Truly the gods that preside over literary destinies could do no more — or much less — for either gentleman!

That Mr. Swinburne did not meekly submit to the strictures passed upon *his* poetry let *Under the Microscope* make manifest. It remains as a portent and a warning should a later generation be confronted with a later moralist-critic like "Thomas Maitland" Buchanan.

---

6 See Appendix III.

7 On the contrary he printed a rather neat rejoinder in one of the defunct periodicals of that day. See Appendix II.

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

WE live in an age when not to be scientific is to be nothing; the man untrained in science, though he should speak with the tongues of men and of angels, though he should know all that man may know of the history of men and their works in time past, though he should have nourished on the study of their noblest examples in art and literature whatever he may have of natural intelligence, is but a pitiable and worthless pretender in the sight of professors to whom natural science is not a mean but an end; not an instrument of priceless worth for the mental workman, but a result in itself satisfying and final, a substitute in place of an auxiliary, a sovereign in lieu of an ally, a goal instead of a chariot. It is not enough in their eyes to admit that all study of details is precious or necessary to help us to a larger and surer knowledge of the whole; that without the invaluable support and illumination of practical research and physical science, the human intellect must still as of old go limping and blinking on its way nowhither, lame of one foot at best and blind of one eye; the knowledge of bones and stones is good not merely as a part of that general knowledge of

nature inward as well as outward, human as well as other, towards which the mind would fain make its way yet a little and again a little further through all obstruction of error and suffusion of mystery; it is in the bones and stones themselves, not in man at all or the works of man, that we are to find the ultimate satisfaction and the crowning interest of our studies. Not because the study of such things will rid us of traditional obstacles that lay in the way of free and fruitful thought, will clear the air of mythologic malaria, will purge the spiritual city from religious pestilence; not because each one new certitude attained must involve the overthrow of more illusions than one, and every fact we can gather brings us by so much nearer to the truth we seek, serves as it were for a single brick or beam in the great house of knowledge that all students and thinkers who have served the world or are to serve it have borne or will bear their part in helping to construct. The facts are not of value simply because they serve the truth; nor are there so many mansions as once we may have thought in this house of truth, nor so many ministers in its service. It is vain to reply, while admitting that truth cannot be reached by men who take no due account of facts, that each fact is not all the truth, each limb is not all the body, each thought is not all the mind; and that even men (if such there be) ignorant of everything but what other men have written may

possibly not be ignorant of everything worth knowledge, destitute of every capacity worth exercise. One study alone, and one form of study, is worthy the time and the respect of men who would escape the contempt of their kind. Impressed by this consideration — impelled by late regret and tardy ambition to atone if possible for lost time and thought misspent — I have determined to devote at least a spare hour to the science of comparative entomology; and propose here to set down in a few loose notes the modest outcome of my morning's researches.

Every beginner must be content to start from the lowest point — to begin at the bottom if he ever hopes to reach the top, or indeed to gain any trustworthy foothold at all. Our studies should therefore in this case also be founded on a preliminary examination of things belonging to the class of the infinitely little; and of these we shall do well to take up first such samples for inspection as may happen to lie nearest at hand. As the traveller who may desire to put to profit in the interest of this science his enforced night's lodging "in the worst inn's worst room" must take for his subjects of study the special or generic properties of such parasites as may leap or creep about his place of rest or unrest; so the lodger in the house of art or literature who for once may wish in like manner to utilize his waste moments must not scorn to pay some passing attention to the varieties of the critical tribe.

But if the traveller be a man of truly scientific mind, he will be careful to let no sense of irritation impair the value and accuracy of his research. Such evidence of sensitiveness or suffering would not indeed imply that he thought otherwise or more highly of these than of other parasites; it is but a nameless thing after all, unmentionable as well as anonymous, that has pierced his skin if it be really pierced, or inflamed his blood if it be indeed inflamed; but those are the best travellers whose natures are not made of such penetrable or inflammable stuff. A critic is, at worst, but what Blake once painted—the ghost of a flea; and the man must be very tough of skin or very tender of spirit who would not rather have to do with the shadow than the substance. The phantom confessed to the painter that he would destroy the world if his power were commensurate with his will; but then it was not. Exactly as much power as was given to Blake's sitter (if that term be in his case allowable) to destroy the world is given to the critic to destroy the creator; exactly so much of that enviable power has a Pontmartin (for example) on Hugo and Balzac, or an Austin (for example) on Tennyson and Browning, or a Buchanan (for example) on any living thing. Considering which fact, all men of sense and self-respect will assuredly be of one mind with the greatest Englishman left among us to represent the mighty breed of our elders since Landor

went to find his equals and rejoin his kin among the Grecian shades "where Orpheus and where Homer are." It is long since Mr. Carlyle expressed his opinion that if any poet or other literary creature could really be "killed off by one critique" or many, the sooner he was so despatched the better; a sentiment in which I for one humbly but heartily concur.

There is one large and interesting class of the critical race which unfortunately has hitherto in great measure defied the researches of science. Any collector who by any fair means has secured a sample of this species may naturally be prone to exhibit it with pride among the choicer spoils of his museum; not indeed for its beauty, and certainly not for its rarity; it may be seen in every hedge and every morass, but the difficulty is to determine and distinguish any single specimen by its proper and recognizable name. This species is composed of the critics known only as anonyms. Being anonymous, how can its members be classified by any scientific system of nomenclature? A mere dabbler in the science like myself must not expect at his first start to secure a prize of this kind; such trophies are not for the hand of a beginner. The sciolist who thinks to affix its label and assign its place to any one specimen of the tribe will be liable to grave error. In the grand pantomime of anonymous criticism the actors shift their parts and change their faces so suddenly that no one

whose life has not been spent behind the scenes can hope to verify his guess at the wearer of such or such a mask. We see Harlequin Virtue make love to the goddess Grundy, and watch if we can without yawning the raddled old columbine Cant perform her usual pirouettes in the ballet of morality; we have hardly heart to sit out, though revived on so rotten a stage by express desire, the screaming farce of religion; and after all we are never sure whether it was Clown or Pantaloon whom we heard snuffling and wheezing in the side-scenes. We go for instance to the old Quarterly Theatre, confident that we shall see and hear the old actors in their old parts, or at least some worthy successor and heir to the sound stage traditions of the house; and indeed we find much the same show of decoration and much the same style of declamation as ever; but we had a tender and pardonable weakness for the old faces and the old voices; and now we cannot even tell if they are here or no; whether the part taken in the first act by an old familiar friend is not continued in the second by a new performer of much promise and ability, remarkable for his more than apish or parrot-like dexterity in picking up and reproducing the tricks and phrases, tones and gestures, of the stage-struck veteran in whose place he stands; but not the man we came to see. We cannot hang upon the actor's lips with the same breathless attention when we know not whether it be master

or pupil who speaks behind the mask. What in the elder actor was a natural gift of personation is but an empirical knack of imitation in his copyist. At least we would fain know for certain whether the moral gambols performed before us are those of the old showman or his ape. Or say that we come thither as to church or lecture: it cannot tend to edification that we should not know whom we sit under. We are distracted throughout sermon-time by doubts whether the veiled preacher be indeed as we thought a man of gravity from his youth upwards, a holy and austere minister of the altar, a Nazarite of life-long sanctity, a venerable athlete of the Church, about whose past there can be no more question than about his right to speak as one ordained to apostolic office and succession by laying on of hands; or haply a neophyte from the outer court, a deacon but newly made reverend, an interloper even it may be or a schismatic: the doubt is nothing short of agony. I imagine, gathered about the pulpit, a little flock of penitents who come gladly to be admonished, who ask nothing better than to be convinced of sin, who listen humbly to the pastoral rebuke, accept meekly the paternal chastisement, of the preacher who summons them before him to judgment; what will be their consternation if they have cause to suspect that it is not an orthodox shepherd of souls whose voice of warning is in their ears, but a new-comer who has climbed into the

sheepfold! Clown masquerading in the guise of Pantaloon; and in place of the man of God at whose admonition the sinner was wont to tremble with Felix, perhaps a comic singer, a rhymester of boyish burlesque; there is no saying who may not usurp the pulpit when once the priestly office and the priestly vesture have passed into other than consecrated hands. For instance, we hear in October, say, a discourse on Byron and Tennyson; we are struck by the fervour and unction of the preacher; we feel, like Satan, how awful goodness is, and see virtue in her shape how lovely; see, and pine our loss, if haply we too have fallen; we stand abashed at the reflection that never till this man came to show us did we perceive the impurity of a poet who can make his heroine "so familiar with male objects of desire" as to allude to such a person as an odalisque "in good society;" we are ashamed to remember that never till now did we duly appreciate the chastity of Dudù and her comrades, as contrasted with the depravity of the Princess Ida and her colleagues; we blush, if a blush be left in us, to hear on such authority "that exception might be taken without excess of prudery to 'The Sisters,'" and to think that we should ever have got by heart, without a thought of evil to alloy the delight of admiration, a poem "in which sensual passion is coarsely blended with the sense of injured honour and revenge." We read, and regret that ever the

fascination of verse should have so effectually closed our eyes and ears against all perception of these deplorable qualities in a poet whose name we have cherished from our childhood; and as we read there rises before us the august and austere vision of a man well stricken in years, but of life unspotted from the world, pure as a child in word and thought, stern as an apostle in his rebuke of youthful wantonness or maturer levity; we feel that in his presence no one would venture on a loose jest or equivocal allusion, no one dream of indulgence in foolish talking and jesting, which (as he would assuredly remind the offender), we know on the highest authority, is not convenient; and we call reverently to mind the words of a poet, in which the beauty of a virtuous old age is affectingly set forth.

"How sweet is chastity in hoary hairs!
  How venerable the speech of an old man
Pure as a maiden's, and a cheek that wears
  In age the blush it wore when youth began!
The lip still saintly with a sense of prayers
  Angelical, with power to bless or ban,
Stern to rebuke tongues heedless of control,—
A virgin elder with a vestal soul."

Or perchance there may rise to our own lips the equally impressive tribute of a French writer at the same venerable shrine.

"Vieillard, ton âme austère est une âme d'élite:
Et quand la conscience humaine a fait faillite,

Ta voix sévère est comme un rappel qu'on entend
Sonner du fond de l'ombre où le sort nous attend.
L'appétit nu, la chair affamée et rieuse,
Source âpre et basse où boit la jeunesse oublieuse,
La luxure cynique au regard fauve et vil,
Rentre, à ton aspect, comme un chien dans son chenil.
Jamais le rire impur ne vint souiller de fange
Ta lèvre où luit le feu de l'apôtre et de l'ange.
Le satyre au chant rauque a peur devant tes yeux;
Le vice à ton abord frémit silencieux;
Et la neige qui pleut sur ta tête qui penche,
Quand on a vu ton cœur, ne semble plus si blanche."

I know not whether the rebuke of venerable virtue had power to affect the callous conscience of the "hoarse-voiced satyr" thus convicted of "the depth of ill-breeding and bad taste;" but I cannot doubt that when in January a like parable was taken up in the same quarter against certain younger offenders, the thought that the same voice with the same weight of judgment in its tones was raised to denounce them must have struck cold to their hearts while it brought the blood to their cheeks. The likeness in turn of phrase and inflexion of voice was perfect; the air of age and authority, if indeed it was but assumed, was assumed with faultless and exquisite fidelity; the choice of points for attack and words to attack with was as nearly as might be identical. "No terms of condemnation could be too strong," so rang that "terrible, voice of most just judgment," "for the revolting picturesqueness of A's description of the sexual relation;" it was illustrated by sacramental symbols

of "gross profanity;" it gave evidence of "emasculate obscenity,"* and a deliberate addiction to "the worship of Priapus." The virtuous journalist, I have observed, is remarkably fond of Priapus; his frequent and forcible allusions to "the honest garden-god" recur with a devout iteration to be found in no other worshipper; for one such reference in graver or lighter verse you may find a score in prose of the moral and critical sort. Long since, in that incomparable satiric essay which won for its young author the deathless applause of Balzac — "magnifique préface d'un livre magnifique" — Théophile Gautier had occasion to remark on the intimate familiarity of the virtuous journalist with all the occult obscenities of literature, the depth and width of range which his studies in that line would seem to have taken, if we might judge by his numerous and ready citations of the titles of indecent books with which he would associate the title of the book reviewed. This problematic intimacy the French poet finds no plausible way to explain; and with it we must leave the other problem on which I have touched above, in the hope that some day a more advanced stage of scientific

---

*"*Climène.* Il a une obscénité qui n'est pas supportable.

Elise. Comment dites-vous ce mot-là, madame?

Climène. Obscénité, madame.

Elise. Ah! mon Dieu! obscénité. Je ne sais ce que ce mot veut dire; mais je le trouve le plus joli du monde."

MOLIERE, *La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes*, sc. 3.

inquiry will produce men competent to resolve it. Meantime we may remark again the very twang of the former preacher in the voice which now denounces to our ridicule B's "want of sense," while it invokes our disgust as fire from heaven on his "want of decency," in the use of a type borrowed from the Christian mythology and applied to actual doings and sufferings; and once more we surely seem to "know the sweet Roman hand" that sets down our errors in its register, when the critic remarks on the absurd inconsequence of a poet who addresses by name and denounces in person a god in whose personal existence he does not believe. In the name of all divine persons that ever did or did not exist, what on earth or in heaven would the critic in such a case expect? Is it from the believers in a particular god or gods that he would look for exposure and denunciation of their especial creed? Would it be natural and rational for a man to attack and denounce a name he believes in or a person he adores, unnatural and irrational to attack and denounce by name a godhead or a gospel he finds incredible and abominable to him? When a great poetess apostrophized the gods of Hellas as dead, was the form of apostrophe made inconsequent and absurd by the fact that she did not believe them to be alive? For a choicer specimen of preacher's logic than this we might seek long without finding it. But we must not be led away into argument or answer

addressed to the subjects of our research, while as yet the work before us remains unaccomplished. The self-imposed task is simple and severe; we would merely submit to the analysis of scientific examination the examiners of other men; bring under our microscope, as it were, the telescopic apparatus which they on their side bring to investigate from below things otherwise invisible to them, as they would be imperceptible from above but for the microscopic lens which science enables us in turn to apply to themselves and their appliances. As to answer, if any workman who has done any work of his own should be asked why he does not come forward to take up any challenge flung down to him, or sweep out of his way any litter of lies and insults that may chance to encumber it for a moment, his reply for his fellows and himself to those who suggest that they should engage in such a warfare might perhaps run somewhat thus: Are we cranes or mice, that we should give battle to the frogs or the pigmies? Examine them we may at our leisure, in the pursuit of natural history, if our studies should chance to have taken that turn; but as we cannot, when they speak out of the darkness, tell frog from frog by his croak, or pigmy from pigmy by his features, and are thus liable at every moment to the most unscientific errors in definition, it seems best to seek no further for quaint or notable examples of a kind which we cannot profitably attempt

to classify. Not without regret, therefore, we resign to more adventurous explorers the whole range of the anonymous wilderness, and confine our own modest researches to the limits within which we may trust ourselves to make no grave mistakes of kind. But within these limits, too, there is a race which defies even scientific handling, and for a reason yet graver and more final. Among writers who publish and sign such things as they have to say about or against their contemporaries, there is still, as of old, a class which is protected against response or remark, as (to use an apt example of Macaulay's) "the skunk is protected against the hunters. It is safe, because it is too filthy to handle, and too noisome even to approach." To this class belong the creatures known to naturalists by the generic term of coprophagi; a generation which derives its sustenance from the unclean matter which produced it, and lives on the very stuff of which it was born:

> "They are no vipers, yet they feed
> On mother-dung which did them breed:"

and under this head we find ranked, for example, the workers and dealers in false and foul ware for minor magazines and newspapers, to whom now that they know their ears to be safe from the pillory and their shoulders from the scourge there is no restraint and no reply applicable but the restraint and the reply of the law which

imposes on their kind the brand of a shameful penalty; and it is not every day that an honest man will care to come forward and procure its infliction on some representative rascal of the tribe at the price of having to swear that the spittle aimed at his face came from the lips of a liar; that he has not lived on such terms of intimacy with the honest gentleman at the bar that the confidential and circumstantial report given of his life and opinions, habits and theories, person and conversation, is absolutely to be taken for gospel by the curious in such matters. The age of Pope is past, and we no longer expect a man of note to dive into the common sink of letters for the purpose of unearthing from its native place and nailing up by the throat in sight of day any chance vermin that may slink out in foul weather to assail him. The celebrity of Oldmixon and Curll is no longer attainable by dint of scurrilous persistency in provocation; in vain may the sons of the sewer look up with longing eyes after the hope of such peculiar immortality as that bestowed by Swift on the names of Whiston and Ditton: upon their upturned faces there will fall no drop or flake of such unfragrant fame. When some one told Dr. Johnson that a noted libeller had been publicly kicked in the streets of Dublin, his answer was to the effect that he was glad to hear of so clever a man rising so rapidly in the world; when he was in London, no one at whom his

personalities might be launched ever thought it worth while to kick him. There are writers apparently consumed by a vain ambition to emulate the rise in life thus achieved by one of their precursors; and it takes them some time to discover, and despond as they admit, that such luck is not always to be looked for. Some, as in fond hope of such notice, assume the gay patrician in their style, while others in preference affect the honest plebeian; but in neither case do they succeed in attracting the touch which might confer celebrity; the very means they take to draw it down on themselves suffice to keep it off; at each fresh emanation or exhalation of their malodorous souls it becomes more clearly impossible for man to approach them even "with stopped nostril and glove-guarded hand." When the dirtier lackeys of literature come forward in cast clothes to revile or to represent their betters, to caricature by personation or by defamation the masters of the house, men do not now look at them and pass by; they pass without looking, and have neither eye for the pretentions nor cudgel for the backs of the Marquis de Mascarille and the Vicomte de Jodelet.

Of such creatures, then, even though they be nothing if not critical, we do not propose to treat; but only of such examples of the critical kind as may be shown in public without apology by the collector, not retained (if retained at all) for necessary purposes of science on the most pri-

vate shelves of his cabinet. Among these more presentable classes there is considerable diversity of kind to be traced by the discerning eye, though many signs and symptoms be in almost all cases identical. There is the critic who believes that no good thing can come out of such a Nazarene generation as the men of his own time; and there is the critic who believes first in himself alone, and through himself in the gods or godlings of his worship and the eggs or nestlings hatched or addled under the incubation of his patronage. Between these two kinds there rages a natural warfare as worthy of a burlesque poet as any batrachomyomachy that ever was fought out. It is no bad sport to watch through a magnifying glass the reciprocal attack and defence of their little lines of battle and posts of vantage—

> "Et, dans la goutte d'eau, les guerres du volvoce
> Avec le vibrion."

In all times there have been men in plenty convinced of the decadence of their own age; of which they have not usually been classed among the more distinguished children. We are happy in having among us a critic of some culture and of much noisy pertinacity who will serve well enough to represent the tribe. I distinguish his book on "The Poetry of the Period," supplemented as I take it to be by further essays in criticism thrown out in the same line, not for any controversial purpose,

and assuredly with no view of attempting to answer or to confute the verdicts therein issued, to prove by force of reasoning or proclaim by force of rhetoric that the gulf between past and present is less deep and distinct than this author believes and alleges it to be; that the dead were not so far above the average type of men, that the living are not so far below it, as writers of this type have always been equally prone to maintain. I have little taste for such controversy and little belief in its value; but even if the diversion of arguing as to what sort of work should be done or is being done or has been were in my mind preferable to the business of doing as seems to me best whatever work my hand finds to do, I should not enter into a debate in which my own name was mixed up. Whether the men of this time be men of a great age or a small is not a matter to be decided by their own assertion or denial; but in any case a man of any generation can keep his hand and foot out of the perpetual wrangle and jangle of "the petty fools of rhyme who shriek and sweat in pigmy jars," which recur in every age of literature with a pitiful repetition of the same cries and catchwords. I could never understand, and certainly I could never admire, the habit of mind or the form of energy which finds work and vent in demonstration or proclamation of the incompetence for all good of other men; but much less can I admire or understand the impulse which

would thrust a man forward to shriek out in reply some assertion of his own injured merit and the value of the work which he for instance has done for the world even in this much maligned generation. No man can prove or disprove his own worth except by his own work; and is it after all so grave a question to determine whether the merit of that be more or less? The world in its time will not want for great men, though he in his time be never so small; and if, small or great, he be a man of any courage or of any sense, he will find comfort and delight enough to last his time in the quite unmistakeably and indubitably great work of other men past or present, without any such irritable prurience of appetite for personal fame or hankering retrospection of regret for any foiled ambitions of his own. This temper of mind, which all men should be able to attain, must preserve him from the unprofitable and ignoble sufferings of fools and cowards; and self-contempt, the appointed scourge of all envious egotists, will have no sting for him. And once aware that his actual merit or demerit is no such mighty matter in the world's eye, and the success or failure of his own life's work in any line of thought or action is probably not of any incalculable importance to his own age or the next, the man who has learnt not to care overmuch about his real rank and relation to other workmen as greater or less than they, will hardly trouble himself overmuch

about the opinions held or expressed as to that rank and relation. What is said of him must be either true or false; if false, he would simply be a fool — if true, he would also be a coward — to wish it unsaid; for a lie in the end hurts none but the liar, and a truth is at all times profitable to all. In any case then it can do him no damage; for good work and worthy to last is indestructible; and to destroy with all due speed any destructible person or book not worthy to last is no injury to any one whatever, but the greatest service that can be done to the book and the writer themselves, not less — nay perhaps much more — than to the rest of the poor world which has no mind to be "pestered with such water-flies — diminutives of nature." In a word, whatever is fit to live is safe to live, and whatever is not fit to live is sure to die, though all men should swear and struggle to the contrary; and it is hard to say which of these is the more consoling certainty. I shall not, therefore, select any book for refutation of its principle, but merely for examination of its argument; my only aim being to test by this simplest of means what may be its purport and its weight. I find for instance that Mr. Austin, satirist and critic by profession, writing with a plain emphatic energy and decision which make his essays on the poetry of the period easily and pleasantly readable by students of the minute, maintains throughout his book the opposition between two leading figures; the same figures since chosen

for the same purpose by the venerable monitor at whose feet we have already sat attentive and shrunk rebuked. In Byron the mighty past and in Tennyson the petty present is incarnate; other giants of less prominence are ranked behind the former, other pigmies of less proportion are gathered about the latter; but throughout it is assumed that no fairer example than either could be found of the best that his age had to show. We may admit for a moment the assumption that Byron was as indisputably at the head of his own generation, as indisputably its fittest and fullest representative, as we all allow Mr. Tennyson to be of his; and this assumption we may admit, because Mr. Austin is so good and complete a type of one class of the great critical kind, that by such a concession we may enable ourselves to get a clear view and a firm grasp of some definable principles of criticism; and thus to examine as we proposed the arguments on which these are based, and which we approach with no prepense design or premeditated aim to corroborate or to confute them, but simply to investigate. With a writer less clear and less forcible in purpose and in style we might not hope to get sight or hold of any principle at all; but this one, right or wrong and wise or unwise, at least does not babble to no purpose whatever like the "blind mouths" that prattle by mere chance of impulse or of habit. First then we observe that he offers us samples of either poet's work with a great

show of fairness in the choice of representative passages; he bids us, like a new Hamlet rebuking the weakness and the shame of his mother-age, look here upon this picture and on this; and a counterfeit presentment it is indeed that he shows us. Taking an instance from his final essay, the summary and result of the book, we find a few lines from a slight poem of Mr. Tennyson's extreme youth, and one which is by no means a fair example of even his earliest manner, set against the most famous and the finest passage but one in "Childe Harold"—the description of an Alpine thunder-storm. With equal justice and with equal profit we might pick out the worst refuse of dolorous doggrel from the rubbish-heaps of "Hours of Idleness" or "Hebrew Melodies"—say that version of the 137th Psalm so admirably parodied by Landor, of which the indignant shade of Hopkins might howl rejection, while the milder ghost of Brady would dissolve in air if accused of it—that or such another rag or shard of verse from the sweepings of Byron's bad work—and set it against the majestic close of the "Lotus-eaters" or some passage of most finished exaltation from "In Memoriam." But the critic has yet a better trick than this, ingenious and ingenuous as it is, to pervert the judgment of those who might chance to take his evidence on trust. He has copied accurately the short passage chosen to show the immature genius of Tennyson at its feeblest; but the longer passage chosen,

and very well chosen, to show the mature genius of Byron at its mightiest, he has been careful to alter and improve by the studious and judicious excision of two whole intervening stanzas; the second good in itself, but introduced by one stolen from Coleridge and deformed almost past recognition from a thing of supreme and perfect beauty into a formless and tuneless mass of clumsy verbosity and floundering incoherence. Even thus garbled and disembowelled, the passage, noble and delightful as in the main it is, stands yet defaced by two lines which no poet of the first order could have committed; two lines showing such hideous deficiency of instinct, such helpless want of the imaginative sense which in the highest poets is as strong and as sure to preserve from error as to impel towards perfection, that any man with an inner ear for that twin-born music of coequal thought and word without which there is no high poetry possible, must feel with all regret that here is not one of the poets who can be trusted by those who would enjoy them; but one who at the highest and smoothest of his full-winged flight is liable to some horrible collapse or flap of a dislocated pinion. The first offence is that monstrous simile — monstrous at once and mean — of "the light of a dark eye in woman," which must surely have been stolen from Hayley; if even the author of the "Triumphs of Temper" can ever have thought a woman's eye an apt and noble likeness for the whole heaven

show of fairness in the choice of representative passages; he bids us, like a new Hamlet rebuking the weakness and the shame of his mother-age, look here upon this picture and on this; and a counterfeit presentment it is indeed that he shows us. Taking an instance from his final essay, the summary and result of the book, we find a few lines from a slight poem of Mr. Tennyson's extreme youth, and one which is by no means a fair example of even his earliest manner, set against the most famous and the finest passage but one in "Childe Harold"—the description of an Alpine thunder-storm. With equal justice and with equal profit we might pick out the worst refuse of dolorous doggrel from the rubbish-heaps of "Hours of Idleness" or "Hebrew Melodies"—say that version of the 137th Psalm so admirably parodied by Landor, of which the indignant shade of Hopkins might howl rejection, while the milder ghost of Brady would dissolve in air if accused of it—that or such another rag or shard of verse from the sweepings of Byron's bad work—and set it against the majestic close of the "Lotus-eaters" or some passage of most finished exaltation from "In Memoriam." But the critic has yet a better trick than this, ingenious and ingenuous as it is, to pervert the judgment of those who might chance to take his evidence on trust. He has copied accurately the short passage chosen to show the immature genius of Tennyson at its feeblest; but the longer passage chosen,

SCOPE

nyson as the
ot a sufficient
do I think it is ;
mine ; it is the
for the moment
criticism. His
dly injurious to
weakest ; but it
edly, not much
it shows at his
e effect of such
hot of such an
will hardly be
any delight on
otherwise admira-
e praise I should
stand clear of any
incompetence to
t genius ; I have
delight on a task far
of praising with all
fluous yet certainly
magnificent quality
at things of nature
and terrible sense
infinity, which has
no living poet but
—the author of the
Légende des Siècles.
dequate and however
he memory of Byron

of night in storm. This is the true sign of flawed or defective imagination; that a man should think, because the comparison of a woman's eye to a stormy night may be striking and ennobling, therefore the inverted comparison of a stormy night to a woman's eye must also be proper and impressive. The second offence is yet worse; it is that incomparable phrase of the mountains "rejoicing o'er a young earthquake's birth," which again I should conjecture to have been borrowed from Elkanah Settle; it is really much in the manner of some lines cited from that poet by Scott in his notes on Dryden. A young earthquake! why not a young toothache, a young spasm, or a young sneeze? We see the difference between sense and nonsense, pure imagination and mere turbid energy, when we turn to a phrase of Shelley's on the same subject.

> "Is this the scene
> Where the old earthquake-demon taught her young
> Ruin?"

There is a symbol conceivable by the mind's eye, noble and coherent. But to such critics as Mr. Austin it is all one; for them there are no such fine-drawn distinctions between words with a meaning and words without — with them, as with poor Elkanah, "if they rhyme and rattle, all is well." This selection and collocation of fragmentary passages, it will be said, is not the best way to attain a fair and serious estimate of either poet's worth or station; Byron may be or may

not be as much greater than Tennyson as the critic shall please, but this is not a sufficient process of proof. Nor assuredly do I think it is; but the method chosen is none of mine; it is the method chosen by the critic whom for the moment I follow to examine his system of criticism. His choice of an instance is designedly injurious to the poet whom it shows at his weakest; but it seems to me, however undesignedly, not much less injurious to the poet whom it shows at his strongest. Such is frequently the effect of such tactics, the net result and upshot of such an advocate's good intentions. It will hardly be supposed that I have dwelt with any delight on the disparaging scrutiny of an otherwise admirable extract from a poet in whose praise I should have said enough elsewhere to stand clear of any possible charge of injustice or incompetence to enjoy his glorious and ardent genius; I have dwelt indeed with a genuine delight on a task far different from this—the task of praising with all my might, and if with superfluous yet certainly with sincere expression, his magnificent quality of communion with the great things of nature and translation of the joyous and terrible sense they give us of her living infinity, which has been given in like degree to no living poet but one greater far than Byron—the author of the *Contemplations* and the *Légende des Siècles*. This tribute, however inadequate and however unnecessary, was paid to the memory of Byron

before ever his latest English panegyrist laid lance in rest against all comers in defence of his fame; using meantime that fame as a stalking-horse behind which to shoot at the fame of others. And as to his assumed office of spokesman on behalf of Byron—a very noble office it would be if there were any need or place for it—we cannot but ask who gave him his credentials as advocate or apologist for a poet whose fame was to all seeming as secure as any man's? Is the name of Byron fallen so low that such a style of advocacy and such a class of counsel must be sought out to revive its drooping credit and refresh its withered honours? *Quis vituperavit?* Has any one attacked his noble memory as a poet or a man, except here and there a journalist of the tribe of Levi or Tartuffe, or a blatant Bassarid of Boston, a rampant Mænad of Massachusetts? To wipe off the froth of false-hood from the foaming lips of inebriated virtue, when fresh from the sexless orgies of morality and reeling from the delirious riot of religion, may doubtless be a charitable office; but it is no proof of critical sense or judgment to set about the vindication of a great man as though his repute could by any chance be widely or durably affected by the confidences exchanged in the most secret place and hour of their sacred rites, far from the clamour of public halls and platforms made hoarse with holiness,

Ubi sacra sancta acutis ululatibus agitant,

between two whispering priestesses of whatever god presides over the most vicious parts of virtue, the most shameless rites of modesty, the most rancorous forms of forgiveness — the very Floralia of evangelical faith and love. That two such spirits, naked and not ashamed, should so have met and mingled in the communion of calumny, have taken each with devout avidity her part in the obscene sacrament of hate, her share in the graceless eucharist of evil-speaking, is not more wonderful or more important than that the elder devotee should have duped the younger into a belief that she alone had been admitted to partake of a fouler feast than that eaten in mockery at a witch's sabbath, a wafer more impure from a table more unspeakably polluted — the bread of slander from the altar of madness or malignity, the bitter poison of a shrine on which the cloven tongue of hell-fire might ever be expected to reappear with the return of some infernal Pentecost. All this is as natural and as insignificant as that the younger priestess on her part should since have trafficked in the unhallowed elements of their common and unclean mystery, have revealed for hire the unsacred secrets of no Eleusinian initiation. To whom can it matter that such a plume-plucked Celæno as this should come with all the filth and flutter of her kind to defile a grave which is safe and high enough above the abomination of her approach? Not, I should have thought, to those

who hold most in honour all that was worthiest of men's honour in Byron. Surely he needs no defence against this posthumous conjugal effusion at second-hand of such a venomous and virulent charity as might shame the veriest Christian to have shown. And who else speaks evil of him but now and then some priest or pedagogue, frocked or unfrocked, in lecture or review? It should be remembered that a warfare carried into such quarters can bring honour or profit to no man. We are not accustomed to give back railing for railing that is flung at us from the pulpit or the street-corner. In the church as in the highway, the skirt significant of sex, be it surpliced or draggle-tailed, should suffice to protect the wearer from any reciprocity of vituperation. If it should ever be a clerical writer, whether of the regular or the secular order—an amateur who officiates by choice or by chance, or a registered official whose services are duly salaried—that may happen to review a book in which you may happen to have touched unawares on some naked nerve of his religious feeling or professional faith, you are not moved to any surprise or anger that he should liken you to a boy rolling in a puddle, or laugh at you in pity as he throws aside in disgust the proof of your fatuous ignorance; you know that this is the rhetoric or the reasoning of his kind, and that he means by it no more than a street-walker means by her curse as you pass by without

response to her addresses; you remember that both alike may claim the freedom of the trade, and would as soon turn back to notice the one salutation as the other. Priests and prostitutes are a privileged class. Half of that axiom was long since laid down by Shelley; and it is not from any such quarter that he probably would have thought the fame of his friend in any such danger as to require much demonstration of championship. The worst enemies of Byron, as of all his kind, are not to be sought among such as these. They are his enemies who extol him for gifts which he had not and work which he could not do; who by dint of praising him for such qualities as were wanting to his genius call the attention of all men to his want of them; who are not content to pay all homage to his unsurpassed energy, his fiery eloquence, his fitful but gigantic force of spirit, his troubled but triumphant strength of soul; to his passionate courage, his noble wrath and pity and scorn, his bright and burning wit, the invincible vitality and sleepless vigour of action and motion which informs and imbues for us all his better part of work as with a sense of living and personal power; who are dissatisfied for him with this his just and natural part of praise, and by way of doing him right must needs rise up to glorify him for imagination, of which he had little, and harmony, of which he had none. Even when supporting himself as in "Manfred" on the

wings of other poets, he cannot fly as straight or sing as true as they. It is not the mere fluid melody of dulcet and facile verse that is wanting to him; that he might want and be none the worse for want of it; it is the inner sense of harmony which cannot but speak in music, the innate and spiritual instinct of sweetness and fitness and exaltation which cannot but express itself in height and perfection of song. This divine concord is never infringed or violated in the stormiest symphonies of passion or imagination by any one of the supreme and sovereign poets: by Æschylus or Shakespeare, in the tempest and agony of Prometheus or of Lear, it is no less surely and naturally preserved than by Sophocles or by Milton in the serener departure of Œdipus or the more temperate lament of Samson. In a free country Mr. Austin or any other citizen may of course take leave to set Byron beside Shelley or above him, as Byron himself had leave to set Pope beside or above Shakespeare and Milton; there is no harm done in either case even to Pope or Byron, and assuredly there is no harm done to the greater poets. The one thing memorable in the matter is the confidence with which men who have absolutely no sense whatever of verbal music will pronounce judgment on the subtlest questions relating to that form of art. A man whose ear is conscious of no difference between Offenbach and Beethoven does not usually stand up as a judge of

instrumental music; but there is no ear so hirsute or so hard, so pointed or so long, that its wearer will not feel himself qualified to pass sentence on the musical rank of any poet's verse, the relative range and value of his metrical power or skill. If one man says for instance that Shelley outsang all rivals while Byron could not properly sing at all, and another man in reply is good enough to inform him that what he meant to say and should have said was that Byron could not shriek in falsetto like Shelley and himself, the one betweenwhiles and the other at all times, what answer or appeal is possible? The decision must be left to each man's own sense of hearing, or to his estimate of the respective worth of the two opinions given. I have always thought it somewhat hasty on the part of Sir Hugh Evans to condemn as "affectations" that phrase of Pistol's — "He hears with ears;" to hear with ears is a gift by no means given to every man that wears them. Our own meanwhile are still plagued with the cackle of such judges on all points of art as those to whom Molière addressed himself in vain — "qui blâment et louent tout à contre-sens, prennent par où ils peuvent les termes de l'art qu'ils attrapent, et ne manquent jamais de les estropier et de les mettre hors de place. Hé! morbleu! messieurs, taisezvous. *Quand Dieu ne vous a pas donné la connaissance d'une chose, n'apprêtez point à rire à ceux qui vous entendent*

show of fairness in the choice of representative passages; he bids us, like a new Hamlet rebuking the weakness and the shame of his mother-age, look here upon this picture and on this; and a counterfeit presentment it is indeed that he shows us. Taking an instance from his final essay, the summary and result of the book, we find a few lines from a slight poem of Mr. Tennyson's extreme youth, and one which is by no means a fair example of even his earliest manner, set against the most famous and the finest passage but one in "Childe Harold"—the description of an Alpine thunder-storm. With equal justice and with equal profit we might pick out the worst refuse of dolorous doggrel from the rubbish-heaps of "Hours of Idleness" or "Hebrew Melodies"—say that version of the 137th Psalm so admirably parodied by Landor, of which the indignant shade of Hopkins might howl rejection, while the milder ghost of Brady would dissolve in air if accused of it—that or such another rag or shard of verse from the sweepings of Byron's bad work—and set it against the majestic close of the "Lotus-eaters" or some passage of most finished exaltation from "In Memoriam." But the critic has yet a better trick than this, ingenious and ingenuous as it is, to pervert the judgment of those who might chance to take his evidence on trust. He has copied accurately the short passage chosen to show the immature genius of Tennyson at its feeblest; but the longer passage chosen,

and very well chosen, to show the mature genius of Byron at its mightiest, he has been careful to alter and improve by the studious and judicious excision of two whole intervening stanzas; the second good in itself, but introduced by one stolen from Coleridge and deformed almost past recognition from a thing of supreme and perfect beauty into a formless and tuneless mass of clumsy verbosity and floundering incoherence. Even thus garbled and disembowelled, the passage, noble and delightful as in the main it is, stands yet defaced by two lines which no poet of the first order could have committed; two lines showing such hideous deficiency of instinct, such helpless want of the imaginative sense which in the highest poets is as strong and as sure to preserve from error as to impel towards perfection, that any man with an inner ear for that twin-born music of coequal thought and word without which there is no high poetry possible, must feel with all regret that here is not one of the poets who can be trusted by those who would enjoy them; but one who at the highest and smoothest of his full-winged flight is liable to some horrible collapse or flap of a dislocated pinion. The first offence is that monstrous simile — monstrous at once and mean — of "the light of a dark eye in woman," which must surely have been stolen from Hayley; if even the author of the "Triumphs of Temper" can ever have thought a woman's eye an apt and noble likeness for the whole heaven

"In Memoriam" with the Psalms of David as a work akin to these in scope and in effect; who compare the dramatic skill and subtle power to sound the depths of the human spirit displayed in "Maud" with the like display of these gifts in Hamlet and Othello. They are the men who would set his ode on the death of Wellington above Shelley's lines on the death of Napoleon, his "Charge of the Light Brigade" beside Campbell's "Battle of the Baltic" or Drayton's "Battle of Agincourt," the very poem whose model it follows afar off with such halting and unequal steps. They are the men who find in his collection of Arthurian idyls, — the Morte d'Albert as it might perhaps be more properly called, after the princely type to which (as he tells us with just pride) the poet has been fortunate enough to make his central figure so successfully conform, — an epic poem of profound and exalted morality. Upon this moral question I shall take leave to intercalate a few words. It does not appear to me that on the whole I need stand in fear of misapprehension or misrepresentation on one charge at least — that of envious or grudging reluctance to applaud the giver of any good gift for which all receivers should be glad to return thanks. I am not aware — but it is possible that this too may be an instance of a man's blindness to his own defects — of having by any overt or covert demonstration of so vile a spirit exposed my

name to be classed with the names, whether forged or genuine, of the rancorous and reptile crew of poeticules who decompose into criticasters; I do not remember to have ever as yet been driven by despair or hunger or malevolence to take up the trade of throwing dirt in the dark; nor am I conscious, at sight of my superiors, of an instant impulse to revile them. My first instinct, in such a case, is not the instinct of backbiting; I have even felt at such times some moderate sense of delight and admiration, and some slight pleasure in the attempt to express it loyally by such modest thanksgiving as I might. I hold myself therefore free to say what I think on this matter without fear of being taxed with the motives of a currish malignant. It seems to me that the moral tone of the Arthurian story has been on the whole lowered and degraded by Mr. Tennyson's mode of treatment. Wishing to make his central figure the noble and perfect symbol of an ideal man, he has removed not merely the excuse but the explanation of the fatal and tragic loves of Launcelot and Guenevere. The hinge of the whole legend of the Round Table, from its first glory to its final fall, is the incestuous birth of Mordred from the connexion of Arthur with his half-sister, unknowing and unknown; as surely as the hinge of the Oresteia from first to last is the sacrifice at Aulis. From the immolation of Iphigenia springs the wrath of Clytæmnestra,

with all its train of evils ensuing; from the sin of Arthur's youth proceeds the ruin of his reign and realm through the falsehood of his wife, a wife unloving and unloved. Remove in either case the plea which leaves the heroine less sinned against indeed than sinning, but yet not too base for tragic compassion and interest, and there remains merely the presentation of a vulgar adulteress. From the background of the one story the ignoble figure of Ægisthus starts into the foreground, and we see in place of the terrible and patient mother, perilous and piteous as a lioness bereaved, the congenial harlot of a coward and traitor. A poet undertaking to rewrite the Agamemnon, who should open his poem with some scene of dalliance or conspiracy between Ægisthus and Clytæmnestra and proceed to make of their common household intrigue the mainspring of his plan, would not more depress the design and lower the keynote of the Æschylean drama, than Mr. Tennyson has lowered the note and deformed the outline of the Arthurian story, by reducing Arthur to the level of a wittol, Guenevere to the level of a woman of intrigue, and Launcelot to the level of a "co-respondent." Treated as he has treated it, the story is rather a case for the divorce-court than for poetry. At the utmost it might serve the recent censor of his countrymen, the champion of morals so dear to President Thiers and the virtuous journalist who draws a contrast

in favour of his chastity between him and other French or English authors, for a new study of the worn and wearisome old topic of domestic intrigue; but such "camelias" should be left to blow in the common hotbeds of the lower kind of novelist. Adultery must be tragic and exceptional to afford stuff for art to work upon; and the debased preference of Mr. Tennyson's heroine for a lover so much beneath her noble and faithful husband is as mean an instance as any day can show in its newspaper reports of a common woman's common sin. In the old story, the king, with the doom denounced in the beginning by Merlin hanging over all his toils and triumphs as a tragic shadow, stands apart in no undignified patience to await the end in its own good time of all his work and glory, with no eye for the pain and passion of the woman who sits beside him as queen rather than as wife. Such a figure is not unfit for the centre of a tragic action; it is neither ignoble nor inconceivable; but the besotted blindness of Mr. Tennyson's "blameless king" to the treason of a woman who has had the first and last of his love and the whole devotion of his blameless life is nothing more or less than pitiful and ridiculous. All the studious care and exquisite eloquence of the poet can throw no genuine halo round the sprouting brows of a royal husband who remains to the very last the one man in his kingdom insensible of his disgrace. The

unclean taunt of the hateful Vivien is simply the expression in vile language of an undeniable truth; such a man as this king is indeed hardly "man at all;" either fool or coward he must surely be. Thus it is that by the very excision of what may have seemed in his eyes a moral blemish Mr. Tennyson has blemished the whole story; by the very exaltation of his hero as something more than man he has left him in the end something less. The keystone of the whole building is removed, and in place of a tragic house of song where even sin had all the dignity and beauty that sin can retain, and without which it can afford no fit material for tragedy, we find an incongruous edifice of tradition and invention where even virtue is made to seem either imbecile or vile. The story as it stood of old had in it something almost of Hellenic dignity and significance; in it as in the great Greek legends we could trace from a seemingly small root of evil the birth and growth of a calamitous fate, not sent by mere malevolence of heaven, yet in its awful weight and mystery of darkness apparently out of all due retributive proportion to the careless sin or folly of presumptuous weakness which first incurred its infliction; so that by mere hasty resistance and return of violence for violence a noble man may unwittingly bring on himself and all his house the curse denounced on parricide, by mere casual indulgence of light love and passing wantonness a hero king may

unknowingly bring on himself and all his kingdom the doom imposed on incest. This presence and imminence of Ate inevitable as invisible throughout the tragic course of action can alone confer on such a story the proper significance and the necessary dignity; without it the action would want meaning and the passion would want nobility; with it, we may hear in the high funereal homily which concludes as with dirge-music the great old book of Sir Thomas Mallory some echo not utterly unworthy of that supreme lament of wondering and wailing spirits—

ποῖ δῆτα κρανεῖ, ποῖ καταλήξει
μετακοιμισθὲν μένος ἄτης;

The fatal consequence or corollary of this original flaw in his scheme is that the modern poet has been obliged to degrade all the other figures of the legend in order to bring them into due harmony with the degraded figures of Arthur and Guenevere. The courteous and loyal Gawain of the old romancers, already deformed and maligned in the version of Mallory himself, is here a vulgar traitor; the benignant Lady of the Lake, foster-mother of Launcelot, redeemer and comforter of Pelleas, becomes the very vilest figure in all that cycle of more or less symbolic agents and patients which Mr. Tennyson has set revolving round the figure of his central wittol. I certainly do not share the objection of the virtuous journalist to the presentation in art of

an unchaste woman; but I certainly desire that the creature presented should retain some trace of human or if need be of devilish dignity. The Vivien of Mr. Tennyson's idyl seems to me, to speak frankly, about the most base and repulsive person ever set forth in serious literature. Her impurity is actually eclipsed by her incredible and incomparable vulgarity—(*"O ay," said Vivien, "that were likely too"*). She is such a sordid creature as plucks men passing by the sleeve. I am of course aware that this figure appears the very type and model of a beautiful and fearful temptress of the flesh, the very embodied and ennobled ideal of danger and desire, in the chaster eyes of the virtuous journalist who grows sick with horror and disgust at the license of other French and English writers; but I have yet to find the French or English contemporary poem containing a passage that can be matched against the loathsome dialogue in which Merlin and Vivien discuss the nightly transgressions against chastity, within doors and without, of the various knights of Arthur's court. I do not remember that any modern poet whose fame has been assailed on the score of sensual immorality—say for instance the author of "Mademoiselle de Maupin" or the author of the "Fleurs du Mal"—has ever devoted an elaborate poem to describing the erotic fluctuations and vacillations of a dotard under the moral and physical manipulation of a prostitute. The con-

versation of Vivien is exactly described in the poet's own phrase—it is "as the poached filth that floods the middle street." Nothing like it can be cited from the verse which embodies other poetic personations of unchaste women. From the Cleopatra of Shakespeare and the Dalilah of Milton to the Phraxanor of Wells, a figure worthy to be ranked not far in design below the highest of theirs, we may pass without fear of finding any such pollution. Those heroines of sin are evil, but noble in their evil way; it is the utterly ignoble quality of Vivien which makes her so unspeakably repulsive and unfit for artistic treatment. "Smiling saucily," she is simply a subject for the police-court. The "Femmes Damnées" of Baudelaire may be worthier of hell-fire than a common harlot like this, but that side of their passion which would render them amenable to the notice of the nearest station is not what is kept before us throughout that condemned poem; it is an infinite perverse refinement, an infinite reverse aspiration, "the end of which things is death;" and from the barren places of unsexed desire the tragic lyrist points them at last along their downward way to the land of sleepless winds and scourging storms, where the shadows of things perverted shall toss and turn for ever in a Dantesque cycle and agony of changeless change; a lyric close of bitter tempest and deep wide music of lost souls, not inaptly described by M. Asselineau

as a "fulgurant" harmony after the fashion of Beethoven. The slight sketch in eight lines of Matha in "Ratbert" resumes all the imaginable horror and loveliness of a wicked and beautiful woman; but Hugo does not make her open her lips to let out the foul talk or the "saucy" smile of the common street. "La blonde fauve," all but naked among the piled-up roses, with feet dabbled in blood, and the laughter of hell itself on her rose-red mouth, is as horrible as any proper object of art can be; but she is not vile and intolerable as Vivien. I do not fear or hesitate to say on this occasion what I think and have always thought on this matter; for I trust to have shown before now that the poet in the sunshine of whose noble genius the men of my generation grew up and took delight has no more ardent or more loyal admirer than myself among the herd of imitative parasites and thievish satellites who grovel at his heels; that I need feel no apprehension of being placed "in the rank of verminous fellows" who let themselves out to lie for hatred or for hire — "qui quæstum non corporis sed animi sui faciunt," as Major Dalgetty might have defined them. Among these obscene vermin I do not hold myself liable to be classed; though I may be unworthy to express, however capable of feeling, the same abhorrence as the Quarterly reviewer of "Vivien" for the exhibition of the libidinous infirmity of unvenerable age. But these are not the grounds on which

Mr. Austin objects to the ethical tendency of Mr. Tennyson's poetry. His complaint against all those of his countrymen who spend their time in writing verse is that their verse is devoted to the worship of "woman, woman, woman, woman." He "hardly likes to own sex with" a man who devotes his life to the love of a woman, and is ready to lay down his life and to sacrifice his soul for the chance of preserving her reputation. It is probable that the reluctance would be cordially reciprocated. A writer about as much beneath Mr. Austin as Mr. Austin is beneath the main objects of his attack has charged certain poetry of the present day with constant and distasteful recurrence of devotion to "some person of the other sex." It is at least significant that this person should have come forward, for once under his own name, to vindicate the moral worth of Petronius Arbiter; a writer, I believe, whose especial weakness (as exhibited in the characters of his book) was not a "hankering" after persons "of the other sex." It is as well to remember where we may be when we find ourselves in the company of these anti-sexual moralists.

Effeminate therefore I suppose the modern poetry of England must be content to remain; but there is a poet alive of now acknowledged eminence, not hitherto assailed on this hand, about whom the masked or barefaced critics of the minute are not by any means of one mind—if mind we are to call the organ which forms and

produces their opinions. To me it seems that the truth for good and evil has never yet been spoken about Walt Whitman. There are in him two distinct men of most inharmonious kinds; a poet and a formalist. Of the poet I have before now done the best I could to express, whether in verse or prose, my ardent and sympathetic admiration. Of the formalist I shall here say what I think; showing why (for example) I cannot for my own part share in full the fiery partisanship of such thoughtful and eloquent disciples as Mr. Rossetti and Dr. Burroughs. It is from no love of foolish paradox that I have chosen the word "formalist" to express my sense of the radical fault in the noble genius of Whitman. For truly no scholar and servant of the past, reared on academic tradition under the wing of old-world culture, was ever more closely bound in with his own theories, more rigidly regulated by his own formularies, than this poet of new life and limitless democracy. Not Pope, not Boileau, was more fatally a formalist than Whitman; only Whitman is a poet of a greater nature than they. It is simply that these undigested formulas which choke by fits the free passage of his genius are to us less familiar than theirs; less real or less evident they are not. Throughout his great book, now of late so nobly completed, you can always tell at first hearing whether it be the poet who speaks or the formalist. Sometimes in the course of two lines

the note is changed, either by the collapse of the poet's voice into the tuneless twang of the formalist, or by the sudden break and rise of released music from the formalist's droning note into the clear sincere harmonies of the poet. Sometimes for one whole division of the work either the formalist intones throughout as to order, or the poet sings high and true and strong without default from end to end. It is of no matter whatever, though both disciples and detractors appear to assume that it must be at least in each other's eyes, whether the subject treated be conventionally high or low, pleasant or unpleasant. At once and without fail you can hear whether the utterance of the subject be right or wrong; this is the one thing needful; but then this one thing is needful indeed. Disciples and detractors alike seem to assume that if you object to certain work of Whitman's it must be because you object to his choice of topic and would object equally to any man's choice or treatment of it; if you approve, it must be that you approve of the choice of topic and would approve equally of any poem that should start for the same end and run on the same lines. It is not so in the least. Let a man come forward as does Whitman with prelude of promise that he is about to sing and celebrate certain things, fair or foul, great or small, these being as good stuff for song and celebration as other things, we wait, admitting that, to hear if he will indeed

celebrate and sing them. If he does, and does it well and duly, there is an end; *solvitur ambulando;* the matter is settled once for all by the invaluable and indispensable proof of the pudding. Now whenever the pure poet in Whitman speaks, it is settled by that proof in his favour; whenever the mere theorist in him speaks, it is settled by the same proof against him. What comes forth out of the abundance of his heart rises at once from that high heart to the lips on which its thoughts take fire, and the music which rolls from them rings true as fine gold and perfect; what comes forth by the dictation of doctrinal theory serves only to twist aside his hand and make the written notes run foolishly awry. What he says is well said when he speaks as of himself and because he cannot choose but speak; whether he speak of a small bird's loss or a great man's death, of a nation rising for battle or a child going forth in the morning. What he says is not well said when he speaks not as though he must but as though he ought; as though it behoved one who would be the poet of American democracy to do this thing or to be that thing if the duties of that office were to be properly fulfilled, the tenets of that religion worthily delivered. Never before was high poetry so puddled and adulterated with mere doctrine in its crudest form. Never was there less assimilation of the lower dogmatic with the higher prophetic element. It so happens that

the present writer *(si quid id est)* is, as far as he knows, entirely at one with Whitman on general matters not less than on political; if there be in Whitman's works any opinion expressed on outward and social or inward and spiritual subjects which would clash or contend with his own, or with which he would feel his own to be incapable of concord or sympathy, he has yet to find the passage in which that opinion is embodied. To him the views of life and of death set forth by Whitman appear thoroughly acceptable and noble, perfectly credible and sane. It is certainly therefore from no prejudice against the doctrines delivered that he objects in any case to the delivery of them. What he objects—to take two small instances—is that it is one thing to sing the song of all trades, and quite another thing to tumble down together the names of all possible crafts and implements in one unsorted heap; to sing the song of all countries is not simply to fling out on the page at random in one howling mass the titles of all divisions of the earth, and so leave them. At this rate, to sing the song of the language it should suffice to bellow out backwards and forwards the twenty-four letters of the alphabet. And this folly is deliberately done by a great writer, and ingeniously defended by able writers, alike in good faith, and alike in blind bondage to mere dogmatic theory, to the mere formation of foregone opinion. They cannot see that formalism

need not by any means be identical with tradition: they cannot see that because theories of the present are not inherited they do not on that account become more proper than were theories of the past to suffice of themselves for poetic or prophetic speech. Whether you have to deliver an old or a brand-new creed, alike in either case you must first insure that it be delivered well; for in neither will it suffice you to deliver it simply in good faith and good intent. The poet of democracy must sing all things alike? let him sing them then, whether in rhyme or not is no matter,* but in rhythm he must needs sing them.

* In Dr. Burroughs' excellent little book there is a fault common to almost all champions of his great friend; they will treat Whitman as "Athanasius contra mundum:" they will assume that if he be right all other poets must be wrong; and if this intimation were confined to America there might be some plausible reason to admit it; but if we pass beyond and have to choose between Whitman and the world, we must regretfully drop the "Leaves of Grass" and retain at least for example the "Légende des Siècles." As to this matter of rhythm and rhyme, prose and verse, I find in this little essay some things which out of pure regard and sympathy I could wish away, and consigned to the more congenial page of some tenth-rate poeticule worn out with failure after failure, and now squat in his hole like the tailless fox he is, curled up to snarl and whimper beneath the inaccessible vine of song. Let me suggest that it may *not* be observed in the grand literary relics of nations that their best poetry has always, or has ever, adopted essentially the prose form, preserving interior rhythm only. I do not "ask dulcet rhymes from" Whitman; I far prefer his rhythms to any merely "dulcet metres;" I would have him in nowise other than he is; but I certainly do not wish to see his form or style reproduced at second-hand by a school of disciples with less deep and exalted sense of rhythm. As to

What is true of all poets is among them all most markedly true of Whitman, that his manner and his matter grow together; that where you catch a note of discord there you will find something wrong inly, the natural source of that outer wrongdoing; wherever you catch a note of good music you will surely find that it came whence only it could come, from some true root of music in the thought or thing spoken. There never was and will never be a poet who had verbal harmony and nothing else; if there was

---

rhyme, there is some rhymed verse that holds more music, carries more weight, flies higher and wider in equal scope of sense and sound, than all but the highest human speech has ever done; and would have done no more, as no verse has done more, had it been unrhymed; witness the song of the Earth from Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound." Do as well without rhyme if you can, or do as well with rhyme, it is of no moment whatever; a thing not noticeable or perceptible except by pedants and sciolists; in either case your triumph will be equal. In a precious and memorable excerpt given by Dr. Burroughs from some article in the *North American Review*, the writer, a German by his name, after much gabble against prosody, observes with triumph as a final instance of the progress of language that "*the spiritualising and enfranchising influence* of Christianity transformed Greek into an accentuated language." The present poets of Greece, I presume, know better than to waste their genius on the same ridiculous elaborations of corresponsive metre which occupied the pagan and benighted intellects of Æschylus and Pindar. I have heard before now of many deliverances wrought by Christianity; but I had never yet perceived that among the most remarkable of these—"an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace"—was to be reckoned the transformation of the language spoken under Pericles into the language spoken under King Otho and King George.

in him no inner depth or strength or truth, then that which men took for music in his mere speech was no such thing as music.

By far the finest and truest thing yet said of Walt Whitman has been said by himself, and said worthily of a great man. "I perceive in clear moments," he said to his friend Dr. Burroughs, "that my work is not the accomplishment of perfections, but destined, I hope, always to arouse an unquenchable feeling and ardour for them." A hope, surely, as well grounded as it is noble. But it is in those parts of his work which most arouse this feeling and this ardour that we find him nearest that accomplishment. At such times his speech has a majestic harmony which hurts us by no imperfection; his music then is absolutely great and good. It is when he is thinking of his part, of the duties and properties of a representative poet, an official democrat, that the strength forsakes his hand and the music ceases at his lips. It is then that he sets himself to define what books, and to what purpose, the scriptural code of democracy must accept and reject; to determine, Pope himself and council in one, what shall be the canons and articles of the church, which except a democrat do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. With more than Athanasian assurance, with more than Calvinistic rigour, it is then that he pronounces what things are

democratic and of good report, what things are feudal and of evil report, in all past literature of the world. There is much in these canonical decrees that is consonant with truth and reason; there is not a little that is simply the babbling of a preacher made drunk with his own doctrine. For instance, we find that "the Democratic requirements" substantially and curiously fulfilled in the best Spanish literature are not only not fulfilled in the best English literature, but are insulted in every page. After this it appears to us that in common consistency the best remaining type of actual democracy in Europe here must be sought among French or Austrian Legitimists, if not on some imperial Russian or German throne. But Shakespeare is not only "the tally of Feudalism," he is "incarnated, uncompromising Feudalism in literature." Now Shakespeare has doubtless done work which is purely aristocratic in tone. The supreme embodiment in poetic form of the aristocratic idea is "Coriolanus." I cannot at all accept the very good special pleading of M. François-Victor Hugo against this the natural view of that great tragedy. Whether we like it or not, the fact seems to me undeniable that Shakespeare has here used all his art and might to subdue the many to the one, to degrade the figure of the people, to enhance and exalt the figure of the people's enemy. Even here, though, he has not done as in Whitman's view he does always; he

has not left without shades the radiant figure, he has not left the sombre figure without lights; there are blemishes here and there on the towering glory of Coriolanus, redeeming points now and then in the grovelling ignominy of the commons. But what if there were none? Is this play the keynote of Shakespeare's mind, the keystone of his work? If the word Democracy mean anything — and to Whitman it means much — beyond the mere profession of a certain creed, the mere iteration of a certain shibboleth; if it signify first the cyclic life and truth of equal and various humanity, and secondly the form of principles and relations, the code of duties and of rights, by which alone adult society can walk straight; surely in the first and greatest sense there has never been and never can be a book so infinitely democratic as the Plays of Shakespeare.

These among others are reasons why I think it foolish to talk of Whitman as the probable founder of a future school of poetry unlike any other in matter as in style. He has many of the qualities of a reformer; he has perhaps none of the qualities of a founder. For one thing, he is far too didactic to be typical; the prophet in him too frequently subsides into the lecturer. He is not one of the everlasting models; but as an original and individual poet, it is at his best hardly possible to overrate him; as an informing and reforming element, it is absolutely impos-

sible. Never did a country need more than America such an influence as his. We may understand and even approve his reproachful and scornful fear of the overweening "British element" when we see what it has hitherto signified in the literature of his country. Once as yet, and once only, has there sounded out of it all one pure note of original song — worth singing, and echoed from the singing of no other man; a note of song neither wide nor deep, but utterly true, rich, clear, and native to the singer; the short exquisite music, subtle and simple and sombre and sweet, of Edgar Poe. All the rest that is not of mocking-birds is of corncrakes, varied but at best for an instant by some scant-winded twitter of linnet or of wren.

We have been looking up too long from the microscope; it is time to look in again and take note of the subject. We find indeed one American name on which our weekly critics cluster in swarms of praise; one poet whom they who agree in nothing else but hate agree to love and laud as king of American verse; who has sung, they tell us, a song at last truly national and truly noble. The singer is Mr. Lowell; but the song is none of the Biglow Papers, where the humours could not but tickle while the discords made us wince; we laughed, with ears yet flayed and teeth still on edge. The song so preferable to any "Drum-Tap" of Whitman's

was a Thanksgiving Ode of wooden verse sawn into unequal planks and tagged incongruously with tuneless bells of rhyme torn from the author's late professional cap. It was modelled on the chaotic songs of ceremony done to order on state occasions by our laureates of the Restoration and Revolution; preferable in this alone, that the modern author had the grace not to call it Pindaric: which in the sense of Whitehall, not of Thebes, it was; being cut into verses uneven, misshapen, irregular, and irresponsive. As a speech it might have passed muster on the platform; as a song it gave out no sound but such as of the platform's wood. Nor indeed could it; for while it had something of thought and more of eloquence, there was within it no breath or pulse of the thing called poetry. This gracious chant among others has been much belauded—incomparably beyond any praise given in any such quarter to Whitman's deathless hymn of death—by a writer on poetry whom Mr. Austin has reviled with as much acrimony as if he were instead a poet; calling his poor fellow-critic "an ignorant and presumptuous scribbler, wholly unentitled to give an opinion on poetry at all." Far be it from me this time to dispute the perfect justice of the verdict; but I had some hope till now that there might be truth in the proverb, "Hawks do not pyke out hawks' een." It is painful for the naturalist to be compelled to register in his

note-book the fact that there is none. It is sad that the hymnologist, to whom this fact may be yet unknown, should be obliged, after citing the peaceful example of the aviary, to reiterate the lesson that 'tis a shameful sight when critics of one progeny fall out and chide and fight.* Really they should remember that their office is to instruct; and if so, surely not by precept alone. If the monitors of the poetic school go together by the ears in this way in sight of all forms at once, what can be expected of those whom they were appointed (though God only knows by whom) to direct and correct at need? The dirtiest little sneak on the dunce's seat may be encouraged to play some blackguard's trick on better boys behind their backs, and so oblige some one who had no thought of bullying or of noticing such a cur to kick him out into the yard and cleanse the old school of scandalous rubbish. And what may not one of the head-masters (there are more than one in this school), at their next quarterly visitation, say to such a couple of monitors as this?

---

* I cannot help calling just now to mind an epigram — very rude, after the fashion of the time, but here certainly not impertinent but pertinent — cited by Boswell on a quarrel between two "beaux;" the second stanza runs thus, with one word altered of necessity, as that quarrel was not on poetry but on religion: —

"Peace, coxcombs, peace! and both agree;
A., kiss thy empty brother;
The Muses love a foe like thee,
But dread a friend like t'other."

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

"Their little hands were never made
To tear each other's eyes."

Their little hands—can it be necessary to remind them?—were made to throw dirt and stones with impunity at passers-by of a different kind. This is their usual business, and they do it with a will; though (to drop metaphor for awhile) we may concede that English reviewers—and among them the reviewer of the "Spectator"—have not always been unready to do accurate justice to the genuine worth of new American writers; among much poor patchwork of comic and serious stuff, which shared their welcome and diminished its worth, they have yet found some fit word of praise for the true pathos of Bret Harte, the true passion of Joaquin Miller. But the men really and naturally dear to them are the literators of Boston; truly, and in no good sense, the school of New England—Britannia pejor; a land of dissonant reverberations and distorted reflections from our own.*

* Not that the British worshipper gets much tolerance for his countrymen in return. In an eloquent essay on the insolence of Englishmen towards Americans, for which doubtless there are but too good grounds, Mr. Lowell shows himself as sore as a whipped cutpurse of the days "ere carts had lost their tails" under the vulgar imputation of vulgarity. It is doubtless a very gross charge, and one often flung at Americans by English lackeys and bullies of the vulgarest order. Is there ever any ground for it discernible in the dainty culture of overbred letters which, as we hear, distinguishes New England? I remember to have read a passage from certain notes of travel in Italy pub-

This preference for the province of reflex poets and echoing philosophers came to a climax of expression in the transcendant remark that Mr. Lowell had in one critical essay so taken Mr. Carlyle to pieces, that it would seem impossible ever to put him together again. Under the stroke of that recollected sentence, the staggered spirit of a sane man who desires to retain his sanity can but pause and reflect on what Mr. Ruskin, if I rightly remember, has somewhere said, that ever since Mr. Carlyle began to write you can tell by the reflex action of his genius the nobler from the ignobler of his contemporaries; as ever having won the most of reverence and praise from the most honourable among these, and (what is perhaps as sure a warrant of sovereign worth) from the most despicable among them the most of abhorrence and abuse.

A notable example of this latter sort was not long since (in his "Fors Clavigera") selected and chastised by Mr. Ruskin himself with a few strokes of such a lash as might thenceforward, one would think, have secured silence at least, if neither penitence nor shame, on the part of

---

lished by an eminent and eloquent writer—that I could but remember his name and grace my page with it!—who after some just remarks on Byron's absurd and famous description of a waterfall, proceeds to observe that Milton was the only poet who ever made real poetry out of a cataract—"AND THAT WAS IN HIS EYE."

the offender. This person, whose abuse of Mr. Carlyle he justly describes as matchless "in its platitudinous obliquity," was cited by the name of one Buchanan —

ὅστις ποτ' ἐστὶν, εἰ τόδ' αὐ-
τῷ φίλον κεκλημένῳ —

but whether by his right name or another, who shall say? for the god of song himself had not more names or addresses. Now yachting among the Scottish (not English) Hebrides; now wrestling with fleshly sin (like his countryman Holy Willie) in "a great city of civilization;" now absorbed in studious emulation of the Persæ of Æschylus or the "enormously fine" work of "the tremendous creature" Dante;* now descending from the familiar heights of men whose praise he knows so well how to sing, for the not less noble purpose of crushing a school of poetic sensualists whose works are "wearing to the brain;" now "walking down the streets" and watching "harlots stare from the shop-windows," while "in the broad day a dozen hands offer him indecent prints;" now "beguiling many an hour, when snug at anchor

* Lest it should seem impossible that these and the like could be the actual expressions of any articulate creature, I have invariably in such a context marked as quotations only the exact words of this unutterable author, either as I find them cited by others or as they fall under my own eye in glancing among his essays. More trouble than this I am not disposed to take with him.

in some lovely Highland loch, with the inimitable, yet questionable, pictures of Parisian life left by Paul de Kock;" landsman and seaman, Londoner and Scotchman, Delian and Patarene Buchanan. How should one address him?

"Matutine pater, seu Jane libentiùs audis?"

As Janus rather, one would think, being so in all men's sight a natural son of the double-faced divinity. Yet it might be well for the son of Janus if he had read and remembered in time the inscription on the statue of another divine person, before taking his name in vain as a word wherewith to revile men born in the ordinary way of the flesh:—

"Youngsters! who write false names, and slink
behind
The honest garden-god to hide yourselves,
Beware!"

In vain would I try to play the part of a prologuizer before this latest rival of the Hellenic dramatists, who sings from the height of "mystic realism," not with notes echoed from a Grecian strain, but as a Greek poet himself might have sung, in "massive grandeur of style," of a great contemporary event. He alone is fit, in Euripidean fashion, to prologuize for himself.

Πολλοὶ μὲν ἐν γραφαῖσι κοὐκ ἀνώνυμοι
ψεύστης κέκλημαι Σκότιος,* ἄστεως τ' ἔσω,

* For the occasions on which the word *σκότιος* is to be spelt with a capital Σ, the student should consult the last-century glossaries of Lauder and Macpherson.

ὅσοι τε πόντου τερμόνων τ' Ἀτλαντικῶν
ναίουσιν ἔξω σκάφεσι νησιωτικοῖς,
τοὺς μὲν τρέφοντας θώψ ἀπὸ γλώσσης σέβω,
*ὅσοι δ' ἀποπτύουσί μ' ἐμπίπτω λαθών.**

He has often written, it seems, under false or assumed names; always doubtless "with the best of all motives," that which induced his friends in his absence to alter an article abusive of his betters and suppress the name which would otherwise have signed it, that of saving the writer from persecution and letting his charges stand on their own merits; and this simple and very natural precaution has singularly enough exposed his fair fame to "the inventions of cowards"—a form of attack naturally intolerable though contemptible to this polyonymous moralist. He was not used to it; in the cradle where his genius had been hatched he could remember no taint of such nastiness. Other friends than such had fostered into maturity the genius that now lightens far and wide the fields of poetry and criticism. All things must have their beginnings; and there were those who watched with prophetic hope the beginnings of Mr. Buchanan; who tended the rosy and lisping infancy of his genius with a care for its comfort and cleanliness not unworthy the nurse of Orestes; and took indeed much the

* There are other readings of the two last lines:
τοὺς δεσπότας μὲν δουλιᾷ σαίνω φρενί,
ὅσοι δὲ μ' ἀγνοοῦσιν (Cod. Var. *ὅσοισι δ' εἰμ' ἄγνωτος*) *κ. τ. λ.*

same pains to keep it sweet and neat under the eye and nose of the public as those on which the good woman dwelt with such pathetic minuteness of recollection in after years. The babe may not always have been discreet;

νέα δὲ νηδὺς αὐτάρκης τέκνων·

and there were others who found its swaddling clothes not invariably in such condition as to dispense with the services of the "fuller;"

γναφεὺς τροφεύς τε ταὐτον εἰχέτην τέλος.

In effect there were those who found the woes and devotions of Doll Tearsheet or Nell Nameless as set forth in the lyric verse of Mr. Buchanan calculated rather to turn the stomach than to melt the heart. But in spite of these exceptional tastes the nursing journals, it should seem, abated no jot of heart or hope for their nursling.

"Petit poisson deviendra grand
Pourvu que Dieu lui prête vie."

Petit bonhomme will not, it appears. The tadpole poet will never grow into anything bigger than a frog; not though in that stage of development he should puff and blow himself till he bursts with windy adulation at the heels of the laurelled ox.

When some time since a passing notice was bestowed by writers of another sort on Mr. Buchanan's dramatic performance in the part of Thomas Maitland, it was observed with very

just indignation by a literary ally that Mr. Rossetti was not ashamed to avow in the face of heaven and the press his utter ignorance of the writings of that poet — or perhaps we should say of those poets. The loss was too certainly his own. It is no light thing for a man who has any interest in the poetic production of his time to be ignorant of works which have won from the critic, who of all others must be most competent to speak on the subject with the authority of the most intimate acquaintance, such eloquence of praise as has deservedly been lavished on Mr. Buchanan. A living critic of no less note in the world of letters than himself has drawn public attention to the deep and delicate beauties of his work; to "the intense loving tenderness of the coarse woman Nell towards her brutal paramour, the exquisite delicacy and fine spiritual vision of the old village schoolmaster," &c. &c. This pathetic tribute to the poet Buchanan was paid by no less a person than Buchanan the critic. Its effect is heightened by comparison with the just but rigid severity of that writer's verdict on other men — on the "gross" work of Shakespeare, the "brutal" work of Carlyle, the "sickening and peculiar" work of Thackeray, the "wooden-headed," "hectic," and "hysterical" qualities which are severally notable and condemnable in the work of Landor, of Keats, and of Shelley. In like manner his condemnation of contemporary impurities is thrown into

fuller relief by his tribute to the moral sincerity of Petronius and the "singular purity" of Ben Jonson. For once I have the honour and pleasure to agree with him; I find the "purity" of the author of "Bartholomew Fair" a very "singular" sort of purity indeed. There is however another play of that great writer's, which, though it might be commended by his well-wishers to the special study of Mr. Buchanan, I can hardly suppose to be the favourite work which has raised the old poet so high in his esteem. In this play Jonson has traced with his bitterest fidelity the career of a "gentleman parcel-poet," one Laberius Crispinus, whose life is spent in the struggle to make his way among his betters by a happy alternation and admixture of calumny with servility; one who will fasten himself uninvited on the acquaintance of a superior with fulsome and obtrusive ostentation of good-will; inflict upon his passive and reluctant victim the recitation of his verses in a public place; offer him friendship and alliance against all other poets, so as "to lift the best of them out of favour;" protest to him, "Do but taste me once, if I do know myself and my own virtues truly, thou wilt not make that esteem of Varius, or Virgil, or Tibullus, or any of 'em indeed, as now in thy ignorance thou dost; which I am content to forgive; I would fain see which of these could pen more verses in a day or with more facility than I." After this, it

need hardly be added that the dog returns to his vomit, and has in the end to be restrained by authority from venting "divers and sundry calumnies" against the victim aforesaid "or any other eminent man transcending him in merit, whom his envy shall find cause to work upon, either for that, or for keeping himself in better acquaintance, or enjoying better friends;" and the play is aptly wound up by his public exposure and ignominious punishment. The title of this admirable comedy is "The Poetaster; or, His Arraignment;" and the prologue is spoken by Envy.

It is really to be regretted that the new fashion of self-criticism should never have been set till now. How much petty trouble, how many paltry wrangles and provocations, what endless warfare of the cranes and pigmies might have been prevented — and by how simple a remedy! How valuable would the applauding comments of other great poets on their own work have been to us for all time! All students of poetry must lament that it did not occur to Milton for example to express in public his admiration of "Paradise Lost." It might have helped to support the reputation of that poem against the severe sentence passed by Mr. Buchanan on its frequently flat and prosaic quality. And, like all truly great discoveries, this one looks so easy now we have it before us, that we cannot but wonder it was reserved for Mr. Buchanan to

make: we cannot but feel it singular that Mr. Tennyson should never have thought fit to call our attention in person to the beauties of "Maud;" that Mr. Browning should never have come forward, "motley on back and pointing-pole in hand," to bid us remark the value of "The Ring and the Book;" that Mr. Arnold should have left to others the task of praising his "Thyrsis" and "Empedocles." The last-named poet might otherwise have held his own even against the imputation of writing "mere prose" which now he shares with Milton: so sharp is the critical judgment, so high the critical standard, of the author of "The Book of Orm."

However, even in the face of the rebuke so deservedly incurred by the avowal of Mr. Rossetti's gross and deplorable ignorance of that and other great works from the same hand, I am bound in honesty to admit that my own studies in that line are hardly much less limited. I cannot profess to have read any book of Mr. Buchanan's; for aught I know, they may deserve all his praises; it is neither my business nor my desire to decide. But sundry of his contributions in verse and prose to various magazines and newspapers I have looked through or glanced over—not, I trust, without profit; not, I know, without amusement. From these casual sources I have gathered—as he who runs may gather—not a little information on no unim-

portant matters of critical and autobiographical interest. With the kindliest forethought, the most judicious care to anticipate the anxious researches of a late posterity, Mr. Buchanan has once and again poured out his personal confidences into the sympathetic bosom of the nursing journals. He is resolved that his country shall not always have cause to complain how little she knows of her greatest sons. Time may have hidden from the eye of biography the facts of Shakespeare's life, as time has revealed to the eye of criticism the grossness of his works and the purity of his rival's; but none need fear that the next age will have to lament the absence of materials for a life of Buchanan. Not once or twice has he told in simple prose of his sorrows and aspirations, his struggles and his aims. He has told us what good man gave him in his need a cup of cold water, and what bad man accused him of sycophancy in the expression of his thanks. He has told us what advantage was taken of his tender age by heartless publishers, what construction was put upon his gushing gratitude by heartless reviewers. He has told us that he never can forget his first friends; he has shown us that he never can forget himself. He has told us that the versicles of one David Gray, a poor young poeticule of the same breed as his panegyrist (who however, it should in fairness be said, died without giving any sign of future distinction in the field of pseudonymous

libel), will be read when the works of other contemporaries "have gone to the limbo of affettuosos." (May I suggest that the library edition of Mr. Buchanan's collected works should be furnished with a glossary for the use of students unskilled in the varieties of the Buchananese dialect? Justly contemptuous as he has shown himself of all foreign affectations of speech or style in an English writer, such a remarkable word in its apparent defiance of analogy as the one last quoted is not a little perplexing to their ignorance. I hardly think it can be Scotch; at least to a southern eye it bears no recognizable affinity to the language of Burns.) In like manner, if we may trust the evidence of Byron, did Porson prophesy of Southey that his epics would be read when Homer and Virgil were forgotten; and in like manner may the humblest of his contemporaries prophesy that Mr. Buchanan's idyls will be read by generations which have forgotten the idyls of Theocritus and of Landor, of Tennyson and of Chénier.

In that singularly interesting essay on "his own tentatives" from which we have already taken occasion to glean certain flowers of comparative criticism Mr. Buchanan remarks of this contemporary that he seems rather fond of throwing stones in his (Mr. Buchanan's) direction. This contemporary however is not in the habit of throwing stones; it is a pastime which he leaves to the smaller fry of the literary gutter.

These it is sometimes not unamusing to watch as they dodge and shirk round the street-corner after the discharge of their popgun pellet, with the ready plea on their lips that it was not this boy but that — not the good boy Robert, for instance, but the rude boy Thomas. But there is probably only one man living who could imagine it worth his contemporary's while to launch the smallest stone from his sling in such a direction as that — who could conceive the very idlest of marksmen to be capable of taking aim unprovoked at so pitiful a target. Mr. Buchanan and his nursing journals have informed us that to his other laurels he is entitled to add those of an accomplished sportsman. Surely he must know that there are animals which no one counts as game — which are classed under quite another head than that. Their proper designation it is needless here to repeat; it is one that suffices to exempt them from the honour and the danger common to creatures of a higher kind. Of their natural history I did not know enough till now to remark without surprise that specimens of the race may be found which are ambitious to be ranked among objects of sport. For my part, as long as I am not suspected of any inclination to join in the chase, such an one should be welcome to lay that flattering unction to his soul, and believe himself in secret one of the nobler beasts of game; even though it were but a weasel that would fain pass muster as a hart of

grice. It must no doubt be "very soothing" to Mr. Buchanan's modesty to imagine himself the object of such notice as he claims to have received; but we may observe from how small a seed so large a growth of self-esteem may shoot up: —

σμικροῦ γένοιτ' ἂν σπέρματος μέγας πτόθμην·

from a slight passing mention of "idyls of the gutter and the gibbet," in a passage referring to the idyllic schools of our day, Mr. Buchanan has built up this fabric of induction; he is led by even so much notice as this to infer that his work must be to the writer an object of especial attention, and even (God save the mark!) of especial attack. He is welcome to hug himself in that fond belief, and fool himself to the top of his bent; but he will hardly persuade any one else that to find his "neck-verse" merely repulsive; to feel no responsive vibration to "the intense loving tenderness" of his street-walker, as she neighs and brays over her "gallows-carrion;" is the same thing as to deny the infinite value, the incalculable significance, to a great poet, of such matters as this luckless poeticule has here taken into his "hangman's hands." Neither the work nor the workman is to be judged by the casual preferences of social convention. It is not more praiseworthy or more pardonable to write bad verse about costermongers and gaol-birds than to write bad verse about kings and knights; nor (as would otherwise naturally be the case)

is it to be expected that because some among the greatest of poets have been born among the poorest of men, therefore the literature of a nation is to suffer joyfully an inundation or eruption of rubbish from all threshers, cobblers, and milkwomen who now, as in the age of Pope, of Johnson, or of Byron, may be stung to madness by the gadfly of poetic ambition. As in one rank we find for a single Byron a score of Roscommons, Mulgraves, and Winchilseas, so in another rank we find for a single Burns a score of Ducks, Bloomfields, and Yearsleys. And if it does not follow that a poet must be great if he be but of low birth, neither does it follow that a poem must be good if it be but written on a subject of low life. The sins and sorrows of all that suffer wrong, the oppressions that are done under the sun, the dark days and shining deeds of the poor whom society casts out and crushes down, are assuredly material for poetry of a most high order; for the heroic passion of Victor Hugo's, for the angelic passion of Mrs. Browning's. Let another such arise to do such work as "Les Pauvres Gens" or the "Cry of the Children," and there will be no lack of response to that singing. But they who can only "grate on their scrannel-pipes of wretched straw" some pitiful "idyl" to milk the maudlin eyes of the nursing journals, must be content with such applause as their own; for in higher latitudes they will find none.

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

It is not my purpose in this little scientific excursion to remark further than may be necessary on the symptoms of a poetical sort which the skilful eye may discern in the immediate objects of examination. To play the critic of their idyllic or satirical verse is not an office to which my ambition can aspire. Nevertheless, in the process of research, it may be useful to take note of the casual secretions observable in a fine live specimen of the breed in which we are interested, as well as of its general properties; for thus we may be the better able to determine, if we find that worth while, its special and differential attributes. I have therefore given a first and last glance to the poetic excretions of the present subject. Even from such things as these there might be something to learn, if men would bring to a task so unpromising and uninviting the patient eye and humble spirit of investigation by experiment. Such investigation would secure them against the common critical fallacy of assuming that a poem must be good because written on a subject, and it may be written with an aim, not unworthy of a better man than the writer; that a bad poem, for instance, on the life of our own day and the sorrows of our own people can only be condemned by those who would equally condemn a good poem on the same subject; who would admit nothing as fit matter for artistic handling, which was not of a more remote and ideal kind than this: a theory

ὅσοι τε πόντου τερμόνων τ' Ἀτλαντικῶν
ναίουσιν ἔξω σκάφεσι νησιωτικοῖς,
τοὺς μὲν τρέφοντας θώψ ἀπὸ γλώσσης σέβω,
*ὅσοι δ' ἀποπτύουσί μ' ἐμπίπτω λαθών.**

He has often written, it seems, under false or assumed names; always doubtless "with the best of all motives," that which induced his friends in his absence to alter an article abusive of his betters and suppress the name which would otherwise have signed it, that of saving the writer from persecution and letting his charges stand on their own merits; and this simple and very natural precaution has singularly enough exposed his fair fame to "the inventions of cowards"—a form of attack naturally intolerable though contemptible to this polyonymous moralist. He was not used to it; in the cradle where his genius had been hatched he could remember no taint of such nastiness. Other friends than such had fostered into maturity the genius that now lightens far and wide the fields of poetry and criticism. All things must have their beginnings; and there were those who watched with prophetic hope the beginnings of Mr. Buchanan; who tended the rosy and lisping infancy of his genius with a care for its comfort and cleanliness not unworthy the nurse of Orestes; and took indeed much the

* There are other readings of the two last lines:
τοὺς δεσπότας μὲν δουλιᾷ σαίνω φρενί,
ὅσοι δὲ μ' ἀγνοοῦσιν (Cod. Var. *ὅσοισι δ' εἰμ' ἄγνωτος*) *κ. τ. λ.*

same pains to keep it sweet and neat under the eye and nose of the public as those on which the good woman dwelt with such pathetic minuteness of recollection in after years. The babe may not always have been discreet;

νέα δὲ νηδὺς αὐτάρκης τέκνων·

and there were others who found its swaddling clothes not invariably in such condition as to dispense with the services of the "fuller;"

γναφεὺς τροφεύς τε ταὐτον εἰχέτην τέλος.

In effect there were those who found the woes and devotions of Doll Tearsheet or Nell Nameless as set forth in the lyric verse of Mr. Buchanan calculated rather to turn the stomach than to melt the heart. But in spite of these exceptional tastes the nursing journals, it should seem, abated no jot of heart or hope for their nursling.

"Petit poisson deviendra grand
Pourvu que Dieu lui prête vie."

Petit bonhomme will not, it appears. The tadpole poet will never grow into anything bigger than a frog; not though in that stage of development he should puff and blow himself till he bursts with windy adulation at the heels of the laurelled ox.

When some time since a passing notice was bestowed by writers of another sort on Mr. Buchanan's dramatic performance in the part of Thomas Maitland, it was observed with very

invaluable to all worthless and ambitious journeymen of verse, who, were it once admitted as a law, would have only the trouble left them of selecting the subject whereon to emit their superfluity of metrical matter. Akin to this is a fallacy more amiable if not less absurd; the exact converse of the old superstition that anything written "by a person of quality" must be precious and praiseworthy. The same unreasoning and valueless admiration is now poured out at the feet of almost any one who comes forward under the contrary plea, as a poet of the people; and men forget that by this promiscuous effusion of praise they betray as complete a disbelief in any real equality of natural rank as did those who fell down before their idols of the other class. Such critics seem bent on verifying the worn old jest of the Irish reformer: "Is not one man as good as another; ay, and a deal better too?" No one now writes or speaks as if he supposed that every man born in what is called the aristocratic class must needs and naturally, if he should make verses, take his place beside Shelley or Byron; the assumption would be felt on all hands as an impertinence rather than a compliment offered to that class; and how can it be other than an impertinence offered to a larger class to assume, or pretend to assume, that any one born in the opposite rank who may be put forward as a poet must naturally be the equal of Béranger or of Burns? Such an assumption is simply an

inverted form of tuft-hunting; it implies at once the arrogant condescension of the patron to his parasite, and the lurking contempt of the parasite for his patron; not a beautiful or profitable combination of qualities.

A critic in the *Contemporary Review*, but neither Robert Maitland nor Thomas Buchanan, once took occasion to inquire with emphatic sarcasm, what did Shelley care, or what does another writer whom he did the honour to call the second Shelley — how undeservedly no one can be more conscious than the person so unduly exalted — care for the people, for the sufferings and the cause of the poor? To be accused of caring no more for the people than Shelley did may seem to some men much the same thing as to be accused of caring no more for France than Victor Hugo does, or for Italy than did one whose name I will not now bring into such a paper as this. But to some men, on the other hand, it may appear that this cruel charge will serve to explain the jealous acrimony with which the writer thus condemned and dismissed in such evil company "seems" incessantly and secretly to have assailed the fame of Mr. Buchanan — the rancorous malignity with which he must have long looked up from the hiding-place of a furtive obscurity towards the unapproachable heights, the unattainable honours, of the mountains climbed and the prizes grasped by the Poet of the Poor. It mattered little that his disguise was

impenetrable to every other eye; that those nearest him had no suspicion of the villainous design which must ever have been at work in his brain, even when itself unconscious of itself; that his left hand knew not what his right hand was doing (as it most certainly did not) when it cast stones at the sweet lyrist of the slums; masked and cloaked, under the thickest muffler of anonymous or pseudonymous counterfeit, the stealthy and cowering felon stood revealed to the naked eye of honesty — stood detected, convicted, exposed to the frank and fearless gaze of Mr. Buchanan. Can a figure more pitiful or more shameful be conceived? The only atonement that can ever be made for such a rascally form of malevolence is that which is here offered in the way of confession and penance; the only excuse that can be advanced for such a viperous method of attack is that envy and hatred of his betters have ever been the natural signs and the inevitable appanages of a bad poet, whether he had studied in the fleshly or the skinny school. Remembering this, we can but too easily understand how Mr. Buchanan may have excited the general ill-will of his inferiors; we may deplore, but we cannot wonder, that the author of "Liz" and "Nell" should have aroused a sense of impotent envy in the author of "Jenny" and "Sister Helen;" it would not surprise though it could not but grieve us to hear that the author of "The Earthly Paradise" was inwardly consumed

by the canker of jealousy when he thought of the "Legends of Inverburn;" while with burning cheeks and downcast eyes it must be confessed that the author of "Atalanta in Calydon" may well be the prey of rancour yet more keen than theirs when he looks on the laurels that naturally prevent him from sleeping — the classic chaplets that crown the author of "Undertones."

It is but too well known that the three minor minstrels above named, who may perhaps be taken as collectively equivalent in station and intelligence to the single Buchanan, have long been banded together in a dark and unscrupulous league to decry all works and all reputations but their own. In the first and third persons of this unholy trinity the reptile passions of selfishness and envy have constantly broken out in every variety of ugliness; in the leprous eruption of naked insult, in the cancerous process of that rank and rotten malevolence which works its infectious way by hints and indications, in the nervous spasm of epileptic agony which convulses the whole frame of the soul at another's praise, and ends in a sort of moral tetanus at sight of another's triumph. That thus, and thus only, have their wretched spirits been affected by the spectacle of good and great things done by other men, the whole course of their artistic life and the whole tenor of their critical or illustrative work may be cited against them to bear witness. The least reference to the latter will suffice to

show the narrow range and the insincere assumption of their hollow and self-centred sympathies, the poisonous bitterness and the rancorous meanness of their furtive and virulent antipathies. Thomas Maitland, in his character of the loyal detective, has also done the state of letters some service by exposing the shameless reciprocity of systematic applause kept up on all hands by this "mutual admiration society." Especial attention should be given to the candid and clear-sighted remarks of the critic on the "puffing" reviews of his accomplices by the senior member of the gang, and of the third party to this plot by both his colleagues in corruption and conspiracy. If any one outside their obscure and restricted circle of reciprocal intrigue and malignant secrecy has ever won from any of them the slightest dole of reluctant and grudging commendation, it has been easily traceable to the muddy source of self-interest or of sycophancy. To men of such long-established eminence and influence that it must evidently bring more of immediate profit to applaud them than to revile, there are writers who will ever be at hand to pour the nauseous libations of a parasite. Envy itself in such natures will change places on alternate days with self-interest; and a hand which the poor cur's tooth would otherwise be fain to bite, his tongue will then be fain to beslaver. More especially when there is a chance of discharging its natural venom in the very act of that servile caress;

when the obsequious lip finds a way to insinuate by flattery of one superior some stealthy calumny of another. "Ah, my lord and master," says the jackal to the lion (or for that matter to any other animal from whose charity or contempt it may hope for toleration and a stray bone or so now and then), "observe how all other living creatures belong but to some sub-leonine class,* some school of dependents and subordinates such as the poor slave who has now the honour to lick your foot!" This is a somewhat ignoble attitude on the poor slave's part, though excusable perhaps in a hungry four-footed brute; but if any such biped as a minor poet were to play such a game as this of the jackal's, what word could we properly apply to him? and what inference should we be justified in drawing as to the origin of his vicious antipathy to other names not less eminent than his chosen patron's? Might we not imagine that some of the men at whose heels he now snaps instead of cringing have found it necessary before now to "spurn him like a cur out of their way"? It is of course possible that a man may honestly admire

* If we could imagine about 1820 some parasitic poeticule of the order of Kirke White classifying together Coleridge and Keats, Byron and Shelley, as members of "the sub-Wordsworthian school," we might hope to find an intellectual ancestor for Mr. Robert Buchanan; but that hope is denied us; we are reduced to believe that Mr. Buchanan must be autochthonous, or sprung perhaps from a cairngorm pebble cast behind him by the hand of some Scotch Deucalion.

Mr. Tennyson who feels nothing but scorn and distaste for Mr. Carlyle or Mr. Thackeray; but if the latter feeling, expressed as it may be with bare-faced and open-mouthed insolence, be as genuine and natural to him as the former, sprung from no petty grudge or privy spite, but reared in the normal soil or manured with the native compost of his mind,—the admiration of such an one is hardly a thing to be desired.

If however any one of that envious and currish triumvirate whom the open voice of honest criticism has already stigmatized should think in future of setting a trap for the illustrious object of their common malice, he will, it is to be hoped, take heed that his feet be not caught in his own snare. He will remember that the judgment of men now or hereafter on the work of an artist in any kind does not wholly depend on the evidence or the opinions of any Jack Alias or Tom Alibi who may sneak into court and out again when detected. He will not think to protect himself from the degradation of public exposure by the assumption of some such pseudonym as Joseph Surface or Seth Pecksniff. He will not feel that all is safe when he has assured the public that a review article alternating between covert praise of himself and overt abuse of his superiors was only through the merest inadvertence not issued in his own name; that it never would have appeared under the signature of Mr. Alias but that Mr. Alibi hap-

pened by the most untoward of accidents to be just then away "in his yacht" on a cruise among "the western Hebrides;" otherwise, and but for the blundering oversight of some unhappy publisher or editor, the passages which refer with more or less stealthy and suggestive insinuation of preference or of praise to the avowed publications of Mr. Alibi would have come before us with the warrant of that gentleman's honoured name. Credat Judæus Apella! but even the foolishest of our furtive triumvirate will hardly, I should imagine, expect that any son of circumcision or of uncircumcision would believe such a "legend" or give ear to such an "idyl" as that. Rather will he be inclined to meditate somewhat thus, after the fashion of the American poetess at Elijah Pogram's levee: "To be presented to a Maitland," he will reflect, "by a Buchanan, indeed, an impressive moment is it on what we call our feelings. But why we call them so, or why impressed they are, or if impressed they are at all, or if at all we are, or if there really is, oh gasping one! a Maitland or a Buchanan, or any active principle to which we give those titles, is a topic spirit-searching, light-abandoned, much too vast to enter on at this unlooked-for crisis." Or it may be he will call to mind an old couplet of some such fashion as this:—

> "A man of letters would Crispinus be;
> He is a man of letters; yes, of three."

How many names he may have on hand it might not be so easy to resolve: nor which of these, if any, may be genuine; but for the three letters he need look no further than his Latin dictionary; if such a reference be not something more than superfluous for a writer of "epiludes" who renders "domus exilis Plutonia" by "a Plutonian house of exiles:" a version not properly to be criticized in any "school" by simple application of goose-quill to paper.* The disciple on whom "the deep delicious stream of the Latinity" of Petronius has made such an impression that he finds also a deep delicious morality in the pure and sincere pages of a book from which less pure-minded readers and writers less sincere than himself are compelled to turn

* I am reminded here of another contemporary somewhat more notorious than this classic namesake and successor of George Buchanan, but like him a man of many and questionable names, who lately had occasion, while figuring on a more public stage than that of literature, to translate the words "Laus Deo semper" by "The laws of God for ever." It must evidently be from the same source that Mr. Buchanan and the Tichborne claimant have drawn their first and last draught of "the humanities." Fellow-students, whether at Stonyhurst or elsewhere, they ought certainly to have been. Can it be the rankling recollection of some boyish quarrel in which he came by the worst of it that keeps alive in the noble soul of Mr. Buchanan a dislike of "fleshly persons?" The result would be worthy of such a "fons et origo mali"—a phrase, I may add for the benefit of such scholars, which is not adequately or exactly rendered by "the fount of original sin." Perhaps some day we may be gratified—but let us hope without any necessary intervention of lawyers—by some further discovery of the early associations which may

away sick and silent with disgust after a second vain attempt to look it over — this loving student and satellite so ready to shift a trencher at the banquet of Trimalchio — has less of tolerance, we are scarcely surprised to find, for Æschylean Greece than for Neronian Rome. Among the imperfect and obsolete productions of the Greek stage he does indeed assign a marked pre-eminence over all others to the Persæ. To the famous epitaph of Æschylus which tells only in four terse lines of his service as a soldier against the Persians, there should now be added a couplet in commemoration of the precedence granted to his play by a poet who would not stoop to imitate and a student who need not hesitate to pass sentence. Against this good opinion, however, we are bound to set on record the memorable expression of that deep and thoughtful contempt which a mind so enlightened and a soul so exalted must naturally feel for "the

---

have clustered around the promising boyhood of Thomas Maitland. Meantime it is a comfort to reflect that the assumption of a forged name for a dirty purpose does not always involve the theft of thousands, or the ruin of any reputation more valuable than that of a literary underling. May we not now also hope that Mr. Buchanan's fellow-scholar will be the next (in old-world phrase) to "oblige the reading public" with his views on ancient and modern literature? For such a work, whether undertaken in the calm of Newgate or the seclusion of the Hebrides, or any other haunt of lettered ease and leisure, he surely could not fail to find a publisher who in his turn would not fail to find him an *alibi* whenever necessary — whether eastward or westward of St. Kilda.

shallow and barbarous myth of Prometheus." Well may this incomparable critic, this unique and sovereign arbiter of thought and letters ancient and modern, remark with compassion and condemnation how inevitably a training in Grecian literature must tend to "emasculate" the student so trained: and well may we congratulate ourselves that no such process as robbed of all strength and manhood the intelligence of Milton has had power to impair the virility of Mr. Buchanan's robust and masculine genius. To that strong and severe figure we turn from the sexless and nerveless company of shrill-voiced singers who share with Milton the curse of enforced effeminacy; from the pitiful soprano notes of such dubious creatures as Marlowe, Jonson, Chapman, Gray, Coleridge, Shelley, Landor, "cum semiviro comitatu," we avert our ears to catch the higher and manlier harmonies of a poet with all his natural parts and powers complete. For truly, if love or knowledge of ancient art and wisdom be the sure mark of "emasculation," and the absence of any taint of such love or any tincture of such knowledge (as then in consistency it must be) the supreme sign of perfect manhood, Mr. Robert Buchanan should be amply competent to renew the thirteenth labour of Hercules.

> "One would not be a young maid in his way
> For more than blushing comes to."

Nevertheless, in a country where (as Mr.

Carlyle says in his essay on Diderot) indecent exposure is an offence cognizable at police-offices, it might have been as well for him to uncover with less immodest publicity the gigantic nakedness of his ignorance. Any sense of shame must probably be as alien to the Heracleidan blood as any sense of fear; but the spectators of such an exhibition may be excused if they could wish that at least the shirt of Nessus or another were happily at hand to fling over the more than human display of that massive and muscular impudence, in all the abnormal development of its monstrous proportions. It is possible that our Scottish demigod of song has made too long a sojourn in "the land of Lorne," and learnt from his Highland comrades to dispense in public with what is not usually discarded in any British latitude far south of "the western Hebrides."

At this point, and even after this incomparable windfall in the way of entomology, I begin to doubt whether after all I shall ever make any way as a scientific student. The savours, the forms, the sounds, the contortions, of the singular living things which this science commands us to submit to examination, need a stouter stomach to cope with them than mine. No doubt they have their reasons for being; they were probably meant for some momentary action and passion of their own, harmful or harmless; and how can the naturalist suppose that merely by

accurate analysis of their phenomena he has gauged the secret of their mysterious existence? It is so hard to see the reason why they should be, that we are compelled to think the reason must be very grave.

And if once we cease to regard such things scientifically, there is assuredly no reason why we should regard them at all. Historically considered, they have no interest whatever; the historian discerns no perceptible variation in their tribe for centuries on centuries. It is only because this age is not unlike other ages that the children of Zoilus whet their teeth against your epic, the children of Rymer against your play; the children — no, not the children; let us at least be accurate — the successors of Fréron and Desfontaines lift up their throats against your worship of women:

"Monsieur Veuillot t'appelle avec esprit citrouille;"

Mr. Buchanan indicates to all Hebridean eyes the flaws and affectations in your style, as in that of an amatory foreigner; Mr. Lowell assures his market that the best coin you have to offer is brass, and more than hints that it is stolen brass — whether from his own or another forehead, he scorns to specify; and the Montrouge Jesuit, the Grub-street poet, the Mayflower Puritan, finds each his perfect echo in his natural child; in the first voice you catch the twang of Garasse and Nonotte, in the second of Flecknoe

and Dennis, in the third of Tribulation Wholesome and Zeal-of-the-Land Busy. Perhaps then after all their use is to show that the age is not a bastard, but the legitimate heir and representative of other centuries; degenerate, if so it please you to say — all ages have been degenerate in their turn — as to its poets and workers, but surely not degenerate as to these. Poor then as it may be in other things, the very lapse of years which has left it weak may help it more surely to determine than stronger ages could the nature of the critical animal. Has not popular opinion passed through wellnigh the same stages with regard to the critic and to the toad? What was thought in the time of Shakespeare by dukes as well as peasants, we may all find written in his verse; but we know now on taking up a Buchanan that, though very ugly, it is not in the least venomous, and assuredly wears no precious jewel in its head. Yet it is rather like a newt or blind-worm than a toad; there is a mendacious air of the old serpent about it at first sight; and the thing is not even viperous: its sting is as false as its tongue is; its very venom is a lie. But when once we have seen the fang, though innocuous, protrude from a mouth which would fain distil poison and can only distil froth, we need no revelation to assure us that the doom of the creature is to go upon its belly and eat dust all the days of its life.

THE END.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

I

THE SESSION OF THE POETS

AUGUST, 1866

Di magni, salaputium disertum! — CAT. LIB. LIII

"MR. SWINBURNE'S volume of *Poems and Ballads* having excited a fluster in 1866, a burlesque poem appeared in the *Spectator* for 15 September, 1866, named *The Session of the Poets*. It was anonymous; but rumour — since then confirmed by himself — ascribed it to Mr. Buchanan." *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters, with a Memoir by W. M. Rossetti.* (Octavo, 2 vols. London, 1895.) Vol. I, p. 294.

I.

At the Session of Poets held lately in London,
The Bard of Freshwater was voted the chair:
With his tresses unbrushed, and his shirt-collar undone,
He lolled at his ease like a good-humoured Bear:
"Come, boys!" he exclaimed, "we 'll be merry together!"
And lit up his pipe with a smile on his cheek;—
While with eye, like a skipper's, cocked up at the weather,
Sat the Vice-Chairman Browning, thinking in Greek.

II.

The company gathered embraced great and small bards,
Both strong bards and weak bards, funny and grave,
Fat bards and lean bards, little and tall bards,
Bards who wear whiskers, and others who shave.

Of books, men, and things was the bards' conversation,—
  Some praised *Ecce Homo*, some deemed it so-so,—
And then there was talk of the state of the nation,
  And when the Unwashed would devour Mister Lowe.

III.

Right stately sat Arnold,— his black gown adjusted
  Genteelly, his Rhine wine deliciously iced,—
With puddingish England serenely disgusted,
  And looking in vain (in the mirror) for "Geist";
He hearked to the Chairman, with "Surely!" and "Really?"
  Aghast at both collar and cutty of clay,—
Then felt in his pocket, and breathed again freely,
  On touching the leaves of his own classic play.

IV.

Close at hand, lingered Lytton, whose Icarus-winglets
  Had often betrayed him in regions of rhyme,—
How glittered the eye underneath his gray ringlets,
  A hunger within it unlessened by time!
Remoter sat Bailey,— satirical, surly,—
  Who studied the language of Goethe too soon,
And sang himself hoarse to the stars very early,
  And cracked a weak voice with too lofty a tune.

V.

How name all that wonderful company over?—
  Prim Patmore, mild Alford,— and Kingsley alsoe?
Among the small sparks, who was realler than Lover?
  Among Misses, who sweeter than Miss Ingelow?
There sat, looking moony, conceited, and narrow,
  Buchanan,— who, finding, when foolish and young,
Apollo asleep on a coster-girl's barrow,
  Straight dragged him away to see somebody hung.

VI.

What was said? what was done? was there prosing or rhyming?
Was nothing noteworthy in deed or in word? —
Why, just as the hour of the supper was chiming,
The only event of the evening occurred.
Up jumped, with his neck stretching out like a gander,
Master Swinburne, and squealed, glaring out thro' his hair,
"All Virtue is bosh! Hallelujah for Landor!
I disbelieve wholly in everything! — There!"

VII.

With language so awful he dared them to treat 'em,—
Miss Ingelow fainted in Tennyson's arms,
Poor Arnold rushed out, crying "Sœcl' inficetum!"
And great bards and small bards were full of alarms;
Till Tennyson, flaming and red as a gypsy,
Struck his fist on the table and uttered a shout:
"To the door with the boy! Call a cab! He is tipsy!"
And they carried the naughty young gentleman out.

VIII.

After that, all the pleasanter talking was done there,—
Who ever had known such an insult before?
The Chairman tried hard to rekindle the fun there,
But the Muses were shocked and the pleasure was o'er.
Then "Ah!" cried the Chairman, "this teaches me knowledge,—
The future shall find me more wise, by the powers!
This comes of assigning to younkers from college
Too early a place in such meetings as ours!"

II

THE MONKEY AND THE MICROSCOPE

THE poets of "the fleshly school" across the water are having a lively, but not an edifying, fight among themselves. The young Scottish knight, Robert Buchanan, threw down the gauntlet; and Sir Swinburne of Brittany has picked it up, and has also picked up Robert Buchanan, and put him "*Under the Microscope*,"—that being the title of Swinburne's thunderbolt. With this prelude, the following verses from the last number of the *Saint Pauls Magazine* require no explanation:—

(EVERY SATURDAY, *Boston, August 31st, 1872.*)

"Once, when the wondrous work was new,
I deemed Darwinian dreams untrue;
But now I must admit with shame
The caudal stock from which we came,—
Seeing a sight to slay all hope:
A monkey with a Microscope!
A clever monkey,—he can squeak,
Scream, bite, munch, mumble, all but speak;
Studies not merely monkey-sport,
But vices of a human sort;
Is petulant to most, but sweet
To those who pat him, give him meat;
Can imitate to admiration
Man's gestures, gait, gesticulation;
Is amorous, and takes no pain
To hide his aphrodital vein;

And altogether, trimly drest
In human breeches, coat, and vest,
Looks human; and, upon the whole,
Lacks nothing, save, perchance, a soul.

For never did his gestures strike
As so absurdly human-like,
As now, when, having found with joy
Some poor old human Pedant's toy,
A microscope, he squats to view it,
Turns up and down, peers in and thro' it,
Screws up his cunning eye to scan,
Just like a clever little man!
And from his skin, with radiant features,
Selecting small inferior creatures,
Makes mortal wonder in what college he
Saw real men study entomology?

A clever monkey!—worth a smile!
How really human is his style;
How worthy of our admiration
Is such delicious imitation!
And I believe with all my might
Religion wrong, and Science right,—
Seeing a sight to slay all hope:
A monkey use a Microscope!"

ROBERT BUCHANAN.

III

BUCHANAN'S *APOLOGIA*

IT is well to give the exact language used by Buchanan in making his *amende honourable* to Rossetti. The letter was addressed to Mr. Hall Caine after the poet's death (*Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.* London, 1882. Pp. 71, 72), and read as follows:

"In perfect frankness, let me say a few words concerning our old quarrel. While admitting freely that my article in the *Contemporary Review* was unjust to Rossetti's claims as a poet, I have ever held, and still hold, that it contained nothing to warrant the manner in which it was received by the poet and his circle. At the time it was written, the newspapers were full of panegyric; mine was a mere drop of gall in an ocean of *eau sucrée.* That it could have had on any man the effect you describe, I can scarcely believe; indeed, I think that no living man had so little to complain of as Rossetti, on the score of criticism. Well, my protest was received in a way which turned irritation into wrath, wrath into violence; and then ensued the paper war which lasted for years. If you compare what I have written of Rossetti with what his admirers have written of myself, I think you will admit that there has been some cause for *me* to complain, to shun society, to feel bitter against the world; but happily, I have a thick

epidermis, and the courage of an approving conscience. I was unjust, as I have said; most unjust when I impugned the purity and misconceived the passion of writings too hurriedly read and reviewed *currente calamo;* but I was at least honest and fearless, and wrote with no personal malignity. Save for the action of the literary defence, if I may so term it, my article would have been as ephemeral as the mood which induced its composition. I make full admission of Rossetti's claims to the purest kind of literary renown, and if I were to criticise his poems *now*, I should write very differently. But nothing will shake my conviction that the cruelty, the unfairness, the pusillanimity has been on the other side, not on mine. The *amende* of my Dedication in *God and the Man* was a sacred thing; between *his* spirit and mine; not between my character and the cowards who have attacked it. I thought he would understand,—which would have been, and indeed is, sufficient. I cried, and cry, no truce with the horde of slanderers who hid themselves within his shadow. That is all. But when all is said, there still remains the pity that our quarrel should ever have been. Our little lives are too short for such animosities. Your friend is at peace with God,—that God who will justify and cherish him, who has dried his tears, and who will turn the shadow of his sad life-dream into full sunshine. My only regret now is that we did not meet,—that I did not take him by the hand; but I am old-fashioned enough to believe that this world is only a prelude, and that our meeting may take place — even yet."

It is also well to quote Mr. W. M. Rossetti's final comment on the foregoing retractation:

"Let me sum up briefly the chief stages in this miserable, and in some aspects disgraceful, affair. 1. Mr. Buchanan, whether anonymously or pseudonymously—being a poet, veritable or reputed—attacked another poet, a year and a half after the works of the latter had been received with general and high applause. 2. He attacked him on grounds partly literary, but more prominently moral. 3. After he had had every opportunity for reflection, he repeated the attack in a greatly aggravated form. 4. At a later date he knew that the author in question was not a bad poet, nor a poet with an immoral purpose. The question naturally arises—If he knew this in or before 1881, why did he know or suppose the exact contrary in 1871 and 1872? Here is a question to which no answer (within my cognizance) has ever been given by Mr. Buchanan, and it is one to which some readers may risk their own reply. That is their affair. If Mr. Robert Buchanan concludes that Mr. Thomas Maitland told an untruth, it is not for me to say him nay." *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters, with a Memoir by William Michael Rossetti*, 2 vols. octavo, London, 1895. Vol. I, p. 301.

Let us close this old unhappy subject by reprinting the dedication prefixed to Buchanan's romance of *God and the Man* (1881):

TO AN OLD ENEMY.

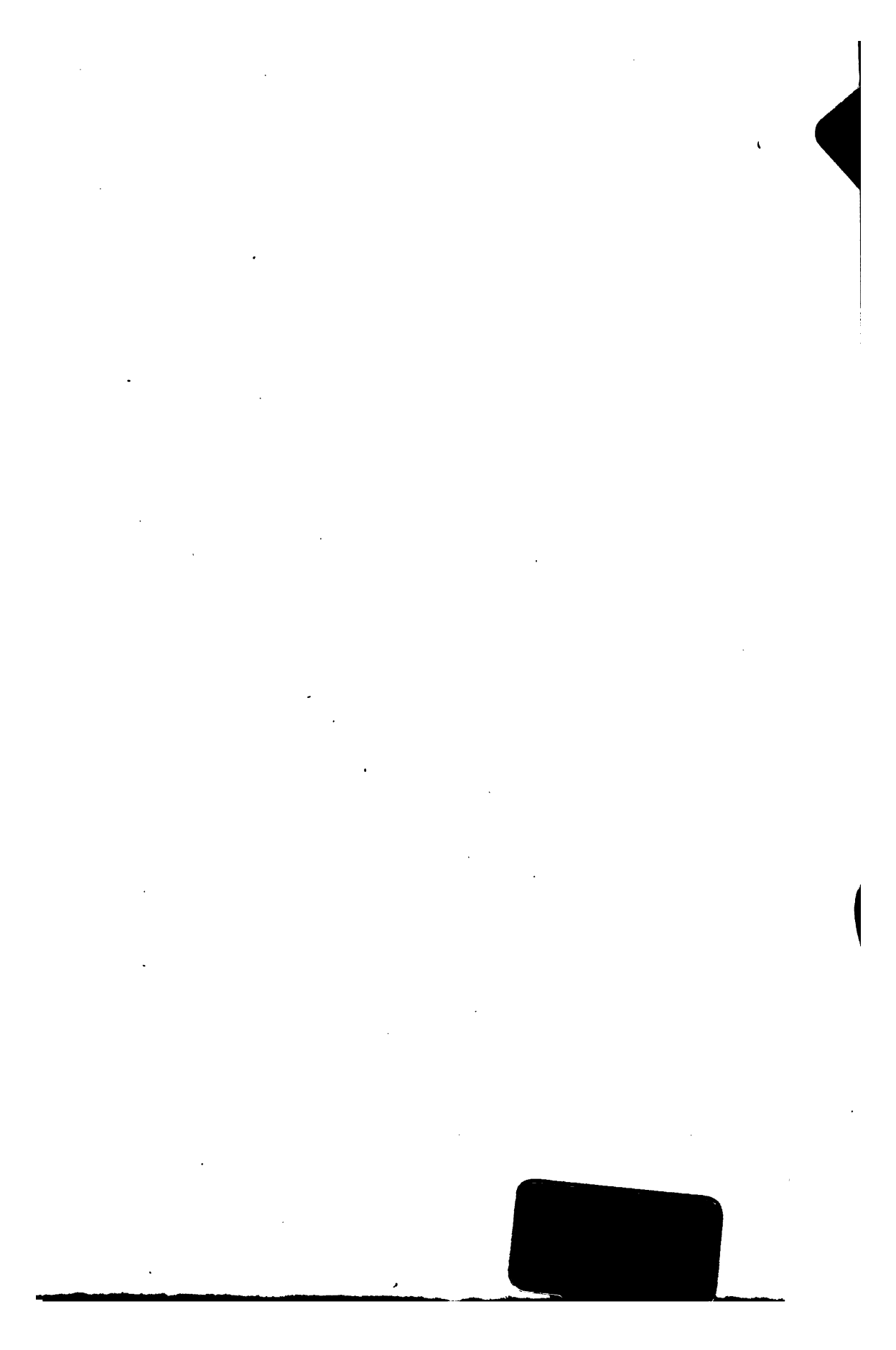
I would have snatch'd a bay-leaf from thy brow,
Wronging the chaplet on an honoured head;
In peace and charity I bring thee now
A lily-flower instead.

APPENDIX

Pure as thy purpose, blameless as thy song,
Sweet as thy spirit, may this offering be;
Forget the bitter blame that did thee wrong,
And take the gift from me!

In a later edition the following verses were added to the dedication:

TO DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI.

Calmly, thy royal robe of death around thee,
Thou sleepest, and weeping brethren round thee stand—
Gently they placed, ere yet God's angel crown'd thee,
My lily in thy hand!

I never knew thee living, O my brother!
But on thy breast my lily of love now lies;
And by that token, we shall know each other,
When God's voice saith "Arise!"